



Philippians 4.4-9

Advent 3 – Rejoice in the Lord always!

The season to be merry is almost upon us ...

Our Bible reading catches the theme

Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: rejoice! (4.4)

None of us want to be party poopers, but all this celebrating and rejoicing can sometimes feel a bit hollow and shortlived and escapist. What do we actually have to rejoice about?

The teaching of the New Testament is that we have a great deal to rejoice about – summed up in four words at the end of verse 4 –

The Lord is near.

This is the GOOD NEWS in a nutshell. God is not non-existent, as many people think, nor is he some distant angry judge, stamping around above the clouds, getting madder and madder with what he sees until one day he's going to destroy the whole sorry mess... No! God is *near* – in fact God is *with us* as we see through the Christmas story and beyond.

This is something to rejoice about, however bleak circumstances are, however long it seems we are having to wait for the coming of the Lord. The message is that we are not hated or forgotten by God, neither is the world out of control. The Lord is near, the Lord to whom one day 'every knee will bow' (2.10)

How should we respond?

Verses 5 and 6 show us how to respond to the nearness of the Lord – with gentleness (compassion might be a better translation), thankfulness and a lack of anxiety.

COMPASSION for others should be the hallmark of every Christian's life because we are no different from anyone else, all of us are beneficiaries of God's amazing grace.

THANKFULNESS means seeing life in the context of God's loving care and provision; past, present and future.

ANXIETY may of course be perfectly reasonable at times, but it can also be unhealthy and destructive. The advertising industry, the press and the media all know what makes people tick and sometimes promote anxiety for their own ends.

Waiting

Paul promises that if we reject worldly anxiety and demonstrate in our prayers and our actions the qualities of thankfulness and compassion which reflect God's heart and God's priorities, our reward will be that the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.



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It is in this attitude of thankful, prayerful, generous hope that we wait for the coming of our Lord and the fulfillment of his promises.