

October 15, 2017

Psalm 118:24; Philippians 4:4-13:

“Let Us Rejoice and Be Glad!”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Before I read to you a few verses from the book of Habakkuk, I hope that you will be patient with me as I give you a bit of background information. The major issue in the book centers around the problem of human wickedness in the world - violence, injustice, strife, conflict - and what appears to be the ultimate victory of the wicked over the righteous, who appear to be perishing in agony. The prophet asks about the evil in Judah. The Lord responds that he will raise up the Babylonians to punish Judah. The prophet then asks about the evil among the Babylonians. The Lord responds that the Babylonians also will be punished.

God would have the prophet and his people understand that while wickedness is tolerated, it is only tolerated insofar as the salvation of God's people are concerned. There are times when he allows it to go, and there are times when he abruptly stops it. In the end, all of the violence, injustice, strife, and conflict will be dealt with. But, as we wait for the end, there is the in between time, and God must do his good work in the meantime in such a way that it will accomplish the eternal salvation of those he has chosen to be his eternal companions. The book of Habakkuk encourages us to live by faith in the righteousness of the Savior, to rejoice in the Lord, and to take joy in the God of our salvation.

Habakkuk saw the Babylonians coming and he knew what that meant. It would mean the devastation of the land, crops would fail, livestock would disappear. The economy would tank. People would die, others would be violently uprooted. It would be difficult for many to survive. For all, it would be a mini-picture of the judgement of God, that would remind everyone that there is a hell for those who do not repent of their wickedness. Still, it was also the patience of God, which meant salvation. Having said these things, we now come to the words that I want to place in front of you. Please listen carefully to the words of the prophet Habakkuk (3:16-18):

I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

It is easy to like the Lord if things are going your way, and there are what we count as "blessings" everywhere. It is rather easy to praise God when the harvest is plentiful, the economy is roaring, the nest egg is nicely nesting, life is good, and all is well with our family and the rest of the world. But what happens when all those are removed? Paul is saying the same thing in our epistle lesson for this morning:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Our sinful flesh gets rather irritated and impatient with all of this. Who wants to believe that God is doing good things in our lives when it seems that he is out to get us, as we misunderstand his purpose as he allows violence, injustice, strife, and conflict everywhere, especially in our own lives when we feel surrounded by those who would love nothing more than to get rid of us? "Why doesn't God do something about all of this?" we say to ourselves. Oh, but he has, he has done something about all of this, and he is doing something about all of this, and he will do something about all of this!

The Christian is to be always living in the day of his or her salvation. This is kind of a hard concept to grasp, but it is important. For the child of God, the past, present and future - all the days we live down here - are boiled down by God to the concept of "now" and "the day of salvation." Either we are living in the day of salvation, or we are living in other days. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:1-2, "Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Another way we can say it is in the words of Psalm 118:24. There it says, "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." What is significant about Psalm 118 is that it is a messianic Psalm that prophecies about what Jesus would do for our salvation. When the people of the Old Testament would read this Psalm, hundreds of years before the birth of our Savior, they were to live in the day that was to come and rejoice in it. In the New Testament, every day is lived in the day when Jesus came and went to the altar of the cross to die for all of our sins. The saints of old and the saints of today live in the day of salvation that is always now, always today for the child of God.

This day of salvation is beautifully described by the Psalmist. There is so much in Psalm 118 that it would be good for us to make it a priority, reading and meditating on it often. Incidentally, it was Luther's favorite Psalm for good reason, for it points to the eternal gospel treasures in Jesus Christ our Savior! It speaks of the steadfast love of the Lord that endures forever. In our distress the Lord answers and sets us free. The Lord is on our side so that no one can succeed in their plans to get rid of us. We will not die, but will live and recount the deeds of the Lord. Jesus is our gate of righteousness that we may enter through him. He is our salvation. Though he is rejected by men, he is the stone that is the most important stone by which the people of God become his dwelling. He is the festal sacrifice that has gone to the horns of the altar. He is the strength of forgiveness for all of our sins as well as the impetus for our forever future.

The day of salvation is where we have been raised with Christ in Baptism, seeking the things that are above, living in the fact that Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, which means that he is in control of all things, the whole universe which must serve one purpose in all parts and pieces. Jesus, one of us, is in charge, and everything must therefore serve for our salvation. It is here then that we have the truth that makes all days into one day, a day that sets us free from the trappings of sin, death, and the devil.

Everyday is a struggle where the day of salvation is being assaulted by the possibilities of other days. These other days can be days of embracing and living in sin, days of anxiety and depression, days of allowing the questions and doubts to wreak havoc on one's faith, days of fixing our eyes on all of the

problems of the world so that we live hopeless and even question God and his intentions, days when we are so sour about living in this place that we lose sight of our purpose for being here as well as the wonderful destination that God has planned for us.

You might remember that I said at the beginning of the sermon that Habakkuk was a prophet close to the Babylonian exile. So, when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and did unimaginable damage to the land and the people of Judah, what do you think helped to get God's people through it? They still had the day of salvation to fix their eyes on. The prophet Jeremiah was also a prophet of the Babylonian exile and he recorded these words to those who were in misery as unimaginably miserable days were trying to take over the day of salvation: "For thus says the LORD: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.'"

In the moments when many other days try to crush the day of salvation, we are bid to drive out the other days with all that is in Christ our Savior. He is our rejoicing when there doesn't seem to be anything to rejoice about. He is our peace when all is restless. In the face of all that would get in the way of the day of salvation, we boldly and continually respond: This is the way that the Lord has made **Let Us Rejoice And Be Glad!** I leave you with the words of Paul in our epistle lesson (Philippians 4:8-9):

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott