

How To Prepare For A Blessed Christmas.

Text: Philippians 4:4-7

Suggested Hymns:

9, 5, 2, 623, 19

- 1) With Rejoicing
- 2) With Gentleness
- 3) With Trust In The Lord
- 4) With Peace In Your Hearts

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Philippians 4:4-7, ***4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*** ***5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*** ***6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;*** ***7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today's Epistle was written by St. Paul. Who would think that these joy-inspiring words were written by a man in bonds and chains? From today's Epistle who would think that he was a prisoner whose trial was pending, and who had every reason to fear that the death penalty would soon be imposed upon him?

St. Paul was in Rome at the time and lived ***by himself with the soldier who guarded him.***¹ He was a prisoner, watched and guarded in his own home, and not permitted to go anywhere without his military escort. In the course of time he was to have a trial before Caesar because he was a Roman citizen. It was the Jews who pressed the charges against him.

At that time the outlook was most gloomy for the Christians. Blood-thirsty Nero had occupied Caesar's throne, and like a dark cloud the impending persecutions were hovering over the Christians' heads. They were well aware that they had to expect the worst from the hands of Nero.

But in spite of this gloomy outlook, in spite of his own bonds and chains, the Apostle writes to the Philippians and says, ***4 Rejoice in the Lord always.*** Why

does he tell them to rejoice in spite of the dreary future? Because *The Lord is at hand* he says.

He reminds them of Christ's promise that He would come in the clouds to deliver His saints. Even though Christ had said in Matthew 24:36, *But of that day and hour no one knows*, yet the Apostle says *The Lord is at hand*. He is near, He will come soon, because this was the instruction which Christ had given to His followers that they should continually expect Him, and this also applies to us today. We should watch for His coming in the clouds. We should never say with the evil servant *My master is delaying his coming*.²

We can also say *The Lord is at hand*. Today we can say this in a twofold sense. First, He is at hand, much closer at hand than He was in the days of St. Paul. Today we are much nearer to Christ's second advent when He will return in the clouds with power and great glory. Second, He is at hand to come to us again in His glorious birth when we shall again hear the message of joy, ¹¹ *For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*.³

Soon we will celebrate Christmas. We will wish each other a blessed Christmas. Advent is the time when we prepare for the glorious festival of the Saviour's birth. So as the time is drawing near, let us consider, with the help of the Holy Spirit *how to prepare for a blessed Christmas*.

From our text we can learn how to prepare for Christmas. We should prepare for Christmas with rejoicing, with gentleness, with trust in the Lord, and with peace in our hearts. Let us consider these in turn. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Prepare For Christmas With Rejoicing

⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!* Christians should rejoice always, says the Apostle. Always? Is that really true? Are there not times in the life of a Christian when he has all the reason in the world to be cast down, to be sorrowful, to mourn and to weep?

How can the Christian rejoice when he is ill and has to suffer bodily pain, or when death has entered his peaceful home and deprived him of those whom he loves? How about when he meets with adverse circumstances, with losses, with

misfortunes, so that he does not know how to get along and how to make a living? How can a Christian rejoice when his good name and character are attacked, when he is betrayed, slandered, or defamed?

A Christian can, will and must rejoice always, even when he is greatly afflicted. During his time of affliction is the very time for him to rejoice. It is a very poor Christian who only knows how to rejoice in the days of prosperity, when all things are well with him, and does not know how to rejoice in the days of adversity, when everything seems to go wrong.

Rejoice in the Lord says the Apostle. He does not call for an outward joy, but for an inward joy; not a joy in earthly things, but joy in the Lord.

A Christian has so many reasons to rejoice. The Christian rejoices in the God of his salvation. He rejoices because he has a merciful Father in heaven. He is glad because Jesus died for him and thus his sins are all forgiven, and that heaven shall be his eternal home.

It is true that this joy, which is always concealed in the Christian's heart, does not always manifest itself in joyful exultation. Sometimes it is like the dying coals in the ashes. Likewise with faith. When faith is great and strong, the joy is great in the Christian's heart. But when faith is faltering, weak and vanishing, the Christian feels no joy.

However, God does not leave His Christians in a depressed state for any length of time. The dying coals are soon revived by His life-giving Word, and joy must prevail. Such a joy-inspiring message of our God to us Christians is the message of our Saviour's birth. When this glorious festival of our Saviour's birth approaches, our hearts should be filled with rejoicing in expectation of the great joy which is awaiting us.

Let us put away, then, all our sorrows and cares! Lift up your heads in joyful expectation! Next week you shall again go to Bethlehem in spirit, and there see with the shepherds the heavenly Child in the manger. With old Simeon you shall take the Saviour up in your arms, and press Him to your heart.

The joy which is in store for you on Christmas Day should fill your hearts with rejoicing. We have so many more reasons to rejoice than those people who look forward to Christmas simply for earthly joy, who give no thought to the Saviour, and only expect earthly gifts and earthly treasures to gladden their

hearts. Prepare, then, for a blessed Christmas with rejoicing, heeding the Apostle's word *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*

2. Prepare For Christmas With Gentleness

Let your gentleness be known to all men says the Apostle. With gentleness we should prepare for a blessed Christmas.

With gentleness - what does that mean? Does the Apostle mean to say that we should be gentle in our joy, and not be too joyful as we approach the great festival? He certainly does not mean that, because he not only tells us to rejoice, but, to show that he does not wish to limit our joy, he emphasises the command and adds *Again I will say, rejoice!*

No, the word in the Greek has no single word equivalence in the English. Some translations use the word "moderation" but it means much more than that. It is more like gentleness, forbearance toward others, yielding,⁴ considerateness, and sweet reasonableness. Yet each of these words only touch one side of the Greek concept. Even the Latin lacks a real equivalent.

God and Christ exhibit what it means. God deals with us so leniently and he remembers that we are dust. He withholds His justice for so long. Christ is gentle, kind, patient and much more than only fair. It means all of these things.

The Apostle is saying, *My dear Christians, be gentle and kind!* If others wrong you and injure you, do not pay them back with the same vengeance. Do not render evil for evil, or accusation for accusation. Walk in the path of Jesus Christ Himself ²³ *who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.*⁵

Do not be selfish and quarrelsome, insisting on your rights, but suffer wrong with patience, and be ready and willing to forgive. To whom should the Christians show such gentleness? To whom should they be gentle and kind? Among themselves only?

Certainly not, the Apostle says *Let your gentleness be known to all men*, whether they be Christians or heathen, believers or unbelievers. Let all people with whom you come in contact know and feel and see that you are being lead by a different spirit than the spirit of this world, which is the spirit of self-

centredness, self-love and revenge. Let them know by your gentleness and forbearance that love is the great principle of Christianity, love to all, even to the enemy.

Let us prepare for a blessed Christmas, then, with considerateness, with gentleness and forbearance toward others. Why are so many hearts joyless and dreary on Christmas Day in spite of all outward joy? It is because their heart has not been cleared of those ugly things which stand in the way and therefore prevent true joy and gladness.

How can you be blessed when hatred and revenge have taken possession of your soul, when thoughts of ill will toward others and resentment brings frowns to your brow? Away, then, with strife and contention, and family quarrels! Away with all ugliness toward others, with malice and bitterness!

Extend the hand of reconciliation to those who have wronged you. Heed the Word written in Romans 12:17-18, ¹⁷ *Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.* ¹⁸ *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

Let your gentleness be known to all people and if you are kindly disposed to everyone, and if with love in your heart you approach the day of our Lord's nativity, you will have a truly blessed Christmas.

3. Prepare For Christmas With Trust In The Lord

The third exhortation in our Epistle is this, *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.* To prepare for a blessed Christmas we must also trust in the Lord.

Be anxious for nothing says the Apostle. Are we not to be concerned regarding the things of this life? Are we to let things go as they please, and give no thought as to how we may get along in this world? The Apostle does not mean that.

There are many things which must occupy our minds in this life. We must all work for a living, and manage our affairs prudently and carefully. St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, *If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat*⁶ and to

Timothy *if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*⁷

When the Apostle says *Be anxious for nothing* he is telling us that we should not be given to worrying and be over anxious as to eating and drinking, and clothing, and such things.

It is the same exhortation which Christ so beautifully tells us in the words written in Matthew 6:31–33, ³¹ *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’* ³² *For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.* ³³ *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

Anxiety, worrying about the future, is a disease which easily effects Christians also, and the Apostle shows how this disease is cured when he adds, *but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.* Trust in the Lord, tell Him all your troubles and cares in prayer, with supplication and thanksgiving, and you will not trust in vain. Therefore let us be anxious for nothing, but prayerful for everything, and thankful for anything. To have a blessed Christmas trust in the Lord is necessary.

We are to trust in the Lord. He is the almighty Owner of heaven and earth. Make your requests known to Him, and He will surely not forsake you. Why should you despair when you know that He has promised to provide for you? If we trust in the Lord as we approach the day of our Saviour’s birth we will surely have a blessed Christmas.

4. Prepare For Christmas With Peace In Our Hearts

The fourth way to prepare for a blessed Christmas to have peace in our hearts. The Apostle says *and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

Here the Apostle speaks of the same peace of which the angels sang on the plains of Bethlehem in the night of the Saviour’s birth, when the sweet strains of *Peace on earth* sounded over the fields. This is the same peace which the risen

Lord brought from the tomb when He greeted His disciples and said, *Peace be with you.*

What is this peace? The Apostle says it surpasses all understanding, that is, it is something above human thought, something which even the greatest philosophers of this world cannot attain to and arrive at with their mental faculties. It is something which must be experienced in the heart to know exactly what it is. It is the peace of God. This is true peace.

The person who has this peace dwelling in his heart is perfectly at rest, and nothing can disturb him. He is confident that he is God's dear child and that he has the forgiveness of all his sins through his dear Saviour Jesus, and that he is an heir of eternal life.

The peace of God enables him to say with St. Paul in Romans 8:38–39, ***For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

It is because of God's great love for us that ***He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*** Christ came to bring true peace to mankind, that is, peace between God and man. Man and God are now reconciled through Jesus Christ. The person who approaches the great day of our Lord's nativity with peace in his heart will truly have a blessed Christmas.

May the Lord grant us all, His peace and a blessed Christmas for the sake of His mercy. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Acts 28:16

² Matt 24:48

³ Luke 2:11

⁴ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Philippians*, p875

⁵ 1 Peter 2:23

⁶ 2 Thess 3:10

⁷ 1 Timothy 5:8