

“A Good Attitude for the Lord’s Coming”
(Philippians 4:4-7 – Advent 3 – December 15, 2024)

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

Dear beloved of God in Jesus Christ:

Who would ever think these joy-filled words were written by a man who had been unjustly arrested, mistreated, and imprisoned for years? At this time the apostle Paul was in Rome, awaiting a trial in which he might be sentenced to death for preaching the Gospel. Paul’s outlook might have seemed pretty dismal. Yet, in the midst of his trial, he says: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”*

Why does Paul tell us to rejoice even in times of trouble? *“The Lord is at hand.”* He reminds us that the Lord Jesus is coming to deliver us from all our troubles in this world and bring us into the joys of heaven. We can look forward to that day with joyful anticipation, knowing He already came to win our salvation from sin, Satan, and eternal death. Until He comes again to bring us home to His heavenly Kingdom, our living Lord is at hand to watch over our life and work all things for our good.

Like Paul, we can have **“A Good Attitude for the Lord’s Coming,”** as we welcome Him **1) With rejoicing, 2) With gentleness, 3) With trust, 4) With peace.**

1) With rejoicing

First, with rejoicing: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”* As believers in Christ, we have reason to rejoice at all times and in every circumstance.

How is this possible? Aren’t there times when we have every reason to mourn and weep, rather than rejoice? How can we rejoice when we suffer sickness or pain, or when death has taken away a loved one? How can we rejoice when things are not going well in life, when the dark clouds of this world hang over our heads?

Paul does not speak of a joy that is based on outward circumstances and the things of this world which are passing. It is a joy based on the Lord’s heavenly promises which are eternal. We have joy in our hearts that rests on the unchanging foundation of our Lord Jesus and all He came to accomplish for our salvation and eternal life.

When we feel down and troubled in this world's darkness and gloom, God lifts us up again with His Good News of light and joy in our Savior's birth. In Jesus, our Immanuel, God is with us! God so loves us that He sent His only Son to save us. We have a merciful Father in heaven, who did not spare His Son, but sent Him to die on the cross and take away our sins. And Jesus is risen, having conquered death for us!

Now God gives us all the benefits of Jesus' salvation. In Baptism, He cleansed us of all sin. He poured out His Holy Spirit and faith in our hearts. God has raised us up in spiritual life with His Son, making us His children and heirs of eternal life.

Having done all this for us, He will not abandon us to dark days in this world. God's unfailing promises in Christ put joy in our hearts, no matter what life brings.

The apostle Peter expressed our unfading joy in Christ. In a time when believers faced severe persecution, griefs, and trials, he wrote in 1 Peter 1:3-6: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials."*

In every circumstance, we can join the apostles and believers through the ages, keeping a good attitude for the Lord's coming, as we say: *"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"*

2) With gentleness

In addition to rejoicing, Paul tells us that a good attitude for the Lord's coming includes gentleness: *"Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."*

The word "gentleness" includes being patient, gracious, and considerate to others. We know how difficult this can be. When we feel stressed about some great task or deadline, it is hard to be patient if others get in our way; it is easy to lash out with impatient words and behavior. When we feel hurt by what someone said or did to us, it is hard to be gracious and forgiving; it is easier to hold a grudge and retaliate. When someone seems inconsiderate and inappreciative of what we do for them, it is not easy to be considerate of their needs; it is easier to withhold love and service.

Jesus is the perfect example of gentleness. How many times, when others did not appreciate who He was and what He did for them, He just kept serving in love, ever considerate of their needs. Even in severe pain and adversity, He showed gentleness:

“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” (1 Peter 2:23). On the cross, Jesus even prayed for His enemies: *“Father, forgive them.”*

He did not do this merely as an example for us; He did it as our Savior. In Christ crucified, God forgives all our lack of gentleness, all our hurtful words and behavior. In place of all that, God counts to us Jesus’ perfect life of gentleness and love.

In light of all this, Paul says: *“Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.”* Jesus is near to us each day with His forgiveness. He is close at hand to bring us at last into His heavenly joys. As we live in His grace and gentleness toward us, He moves us to put away all hatred and revenge and live at peace with others (Romans 12:18). By our gentleness, we can let all people know the kind of Savior we have. Such a heart that knows our Savior’s forgiveness and love, and wants to share it with others, has a good attitude for the Lord’s coming.

3) With prayerful trust

Along with rejoicing and gentleness, a good attitude for the Lord’s coming includes prayerful trust: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”*

“Be anxious for nothing.” Does this mean we should not care about anything in life? Should we just let things go how they may, with no thought for how to make ends meet? No, there are legitimate things to care about. We need work to put food on the table, to provide for and protect our family. We need see to that they are in good health physically; and also spiritually, by being in God’s Word together. In our daily callings, we want to do our best on tests, in job interviews, and so on. All this takes careful planning and effort. It is part of being good stewards of God’s gifts, using the abilities and resources He gives to serve one another in love.

But in all the cares of life, we are not to be given to worry or anxiety. Jesus says: *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* (Matthew 6:31-33)

We can get absorbed in anxieties to the point of undue stress, sleeplessness, and bad health. And often, anxiety spreads in the way we treat others less than desirably and pass our anxiety on to them.

The apostle Paul tells us what to do with anxiety: *“But in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”* Trust in the Lord. Cast all your cares on Him in prayer, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

God cares enough for us that He gave us His Son to be born, live, die, and rise again for our eternal life. Along with this, we can trust Him to provide all we need in this temporal life. As we bring all kinds of prayers and petitions to Him, we will find prayers of thanksgiving to add for His faithful lovingkindness. As we entrust all our needs to Him, He gives us a good attitude as we await our Lord’s coming.

4) With peace

Finally, to rejoicing, gentleness, and trust, Paul adds: *“and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

The world offers peace in things like money and possessions, peace in good health, peace in a quiet neighborhood, peace in being accepted by others... The world’s foundations for peace soon crumble and fall when circumstances change.

But Paul speaks of the *“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.”* It is a peace that rises above our human thoughts and changing feelings. It is the peace that rises above our changing circumstances in life.

Jesus says: *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”* (John 14:27). The peace He gives us is the peace of God, the peace of having God’s forgiveness for our sins; the peace of having eternal fellowship with God our Father; the peace of having God watching over our lives and working all things for our good, come what may. This is a peace the world cannot give, the peace of God’s salvation by which He *“will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

We have every reason to rejoice in our Lord’s coming. He already came the first time to bring us salvation. As we rejoice in His forgiveness and love, we have every reason to share His gentleness with others. Since He gives us our greatest need in eternal life, we can trust Him in every need. No matter what circumstances we face in life, we have that peace which passes all understanding, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Indeed, what a good attitude we can have as the Day of the Lord draws near! Let us join Paul in saying: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”*

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.