**Philippians 4:4–7** 4Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: Rejoice! 5Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. 7And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Let’s just take a moment and contemplate the history of the congregation at Philippi. Philippi is first visited by the Apostle Paul during his second missionary journey through the Roman Empire. But exactly how Paul and his companions got to Philippi is quite interesting. The history is recorded for us in Acts 16.

That chapter begins by telling us that as this missionary journey is beginning a rather sharp dispute arose between Paul and Barnabas. The dispute was over whether John Mark should accompany them. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark but Paul didn’t. Paul didn’t because John Mark had started out with them on the first missionary journey and then had deserted the work along the way. Because of this Paul didn’t think him “fit” for the ministry and this caused a split between Paul and Barnabas. I guess it just goes to show that even the Apostles of Jesus had human differences of opinion. Oh, and just so you know, John Mark would later during the third missionary journey of Paul be a big part of that work. In actuality all of you are very familiar with the work of this missionary called John Mark. You only know him by one name. John Mark is actually the author of the Gospel of Mark. But that is not the most interesting part of this history.

The next interesting part is that fact that Paul, now working with Timothy, at first has no thought of going into Macedonia, what is now a part of modern day Europe. Here is what is recorded for us in Acts 16:6-10. **“They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, because they were prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the word in the province of Asia. When they went as far as Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. A vision appeared to Paul during the night. A Macedonian man was standing there, urging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us!’ As soon as he had seen the vision, we immediately made plans to proceed to Macedonia, because we concluded that God had called us to preach the good news to them.”**

Please note that the first city of Macedon they hit is going to be Philippi. Now I have to be honest and tell you that I don’t grasp why the Lord would prevent these missionaries from going into the provinces of Mysia and Bithynia, but that is exactly what happened. The Lord never tells us why he did not want his gospel preached in these areas, at least, preached at this time. It is interesting to note that very early Christian churches are found in this area. Churches not founded by the Apostles but rather by lay members of the early church. Still it is interesting to read that God prevented Paul and Timothy from doing work in these areas and instead sent them to Europe.

So here we are in Philippi. Philippi is a Roman colony, composed mostly of retired Roman soldiers and others of Roman background who had come to settle here. Because it was a Roman town, there weren’t many of Jewish background there for there was no Synagogue to begin preaching at. Paul and companions went down by the river, where a place of prayer had been established and began talking to the women there. Lydia, a dealer in purple, hears the message, believes, and then Lydia opens her house to the missionaries as a place to stay and as a place to worship the Lord Jesus. Things look good.

That is things look good until a slave girl, who Scripture tells us had **“a spirit that foretold the future”** began to follow them. We are told that for days she followed them crying out, **“These men are servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way to be saved.”** Eventually this action of hers got on Paul’s nerves and Paul simply commanded the spirit out of this girl. End of fortune telling! This did not please her owners and they have Paul and Silas arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison.

As Paul and Silas are in the prison that night an earthquake occurs and their leg stocks and other chains fall off, not to mention all the prison doors flew open. The jailer was going to do himself in, thinking all the prisoners had escaped but Paul calls out and stops him. That night the jailer and his entire household are brought to faith and baptized. The next day the magistrates of the city learn that these men, though Jewish were also Roman citizens who had been beaten and jailed without a trial. They came, apologized and politely asked that they leave the city. Paul and Silas say good-bye to all, and off they go.

Yet the congregation started there, thrived. They were never rich or big, but they are faithful to the message and very much involved in the work of the Lord. The Philippians, again and again, of their own goodness, send gifts and helps to Paul, as the years progress. It is just a testimony to what can be when the work is of the Lord and God desires to bless the people with His grace and love.

This letter to the Philippians that we are reading was written by Paul some ten years later. Over the years they had suffered persecutions and all sorts of difficulties as believers in the Lord. Actually, Paul himself is writing from prison in Rome, there because of his preaching of Jesus. I tell you all of this because this knowledge makes the words before us all the more important and endearing. Our theme will be: **THE PEACE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.**

If you followed all that I have told you, you then grasp that these words are written while Paul is in chains and prison because of the name of Jesus. At the same time the Philippians are undergoing persecution and hardship. And yet look what he writes. This section starts, **“Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again; Rejoice!”** We are being asked to rejoice, to find joy, to be glad. The Apostle must have been out of his mind to say such a thing. Yet the whole epistle of Philippians is one that emphasizes this idea of joy and gladness…even in the midst of trouble. Who better to help them grasp this joy than the Apostle Paul, in chains, in prison and still a man with a heart that rejoices! What we have to do is ask, “How, how could there be joy? How could Paul find joy? How could the Philippians find joy? How can you and I find joy?

The answer is right in front of us. That joy, that rejoicing is **“in the Lord.”** If you would, let me quote from Sermon Studies on the Epistle, Series C one of the books I use to aid my sermons. I quote from page 27. Sometimes someone else says something so good it just needs to be repeated. *“Yet for all the emphasis on rejoicing, the key phrase is ‘ev kuriw’, in the sphere of the Lord, in the context of the relationship God has established through faith in his Son. There is the key to a Christian’s rejoicing. Paul exhortation is not a call for silly numbness to one’s circumstances or a giddy insensitivity to other’s troubles. Far from it; a Christian’s emotional or physical pain is still pain; hurts, whether our own or others’, still hurt. What comforts distress, enhances happiness, and lifts the in-between times to a higher plane, is the foundation of Christian faith and life—the certainty of being “in the Lord” because of God’s gracious gift of full forgiveness for every sin. Faith’s apprehension and comprehension of his status as God’s blood-bought child gives the Christian a long-view perspective that includes an eternity of perfect joy. Christian joy here is both the preview and the outgrowth of joy hereafter. It is the theme of a Christian’s life.”*

Those are awesome words. I would hope all of you would make a copy of those words and post them on your refrigerator or someplace. They are words that remind us of what we have in Jesus, what this faith of ours is really all about. It is not about being good and perfect. It is not about a life rosy colored and sugary laden. It is a real life with the wonder of Jesus and his awesome love for you embedded deep in your heart. God has so loved you that he sent His Son to be your Savior. Jesus has so loved you that he offered himself on the cross paying fully for our sins and faults. Because of Jesus we are children of God, heirs of eternal life. But even more. With the Holy Spirit given in word and sacrament we are different. We see the darkness because we are in the light. We know complete love and contentment because we know that God is with us, caring for us, watching over us and yes, guiding us in a new life that simply erupts because of the reality of Jesus’ saving power. We are new and different. And to see that, just take a moment and contemplate the next words we hear.

**“Let your gentleness be known to everyone.”** Let me share with you again from my study book: pages 27-28. *“Epieikes“ does not translate easily into English. Attempts include “reasonable, yielding, gracious, forbearing, gentle and considerate. At best, each of these conveys but one facet of what it is to be “Epieikes or gentle”. It is a word that indicates a willingness to yield one’s rights without a hint of weakness or softness. On the contrary, it describes someone in a superior position of rank or strength or argument kindly deferring to someone in an inferior position.”*

You know what I thought of? A story I had read. It was about a guard at a warehouse. That guard was instructed that no one without a badge was to go into the warehouse. No one! That was his job. One day, an older man arrived at his gate and was just going to walk in but the guard stopped him. “Sorry sir, but you can’t go in without a security badge!” The man said he was in a hurry, but nope, the guard stood his ground, no badge, no entrance! The older man went back to his car, found his badge and then returned to go in uninterrupted, showing the badge clearly to the guard. The guard was surprised when the next day that same man returned to give him a bonus check and a raise. Turns out the old guy was none other than Sam Walton, the founder and owner of Walmart and its warehouses. The guard was commended for doing his job without fail, even when it was the big boss. Mr. Walton showed the kind of attitude all of us are to have in life, especially those of us who call ourselves followers of Jesus.

Paul goes on. **“The Lord is near.”** It is only the foolish or those who can’t grasp the greatness of the Lord who think the Lord is not around and watching all that is. We are surrounded by the marvel and majesty of God no matter where we are. Paul wasn’t referring to the idea that he thought Jesus was about to return again, but he was emphasizing the fact that as the Lord of lords and the King of kings Jesus is always about us, always present with his might and love, working for our eternal good and salvation.

Paul writes, **”Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”** I love what this particular passage says and I am always amazed at how people can’t grasp the depth and wisdom of what is said here. All of us are indeed aware of the fact that God is all-knowing and all powerful. Now if you read this passage with the attitude and idea that you have to let God know what is going on, then you have made a serious “faith” error. I say that because God already knows and grasps everything! God already knows your problems and troubles, your needs and wants, and yes, God knows exactly what it is that you are going to ask and bug Him about. These words aren’t given to us for the benefit of God. So that we can inform God but rather so that we can be informed of God, so we can remember that he is out there watching over us and taking care of us. It not a matter of telling God what is what but rather you and I remembering the majesty, marvel and power of God working for our good and always on our behalf as his children. Because half the time when we tell God what we want it is not necessarily the best thing for us and so God answers, “No.” But in our asking, we are giving time to contemplate and consider what it is that is God pleasing and good in our lives. To learn to turn to God is to learn to trust Him for who and what He is!

Finally Paul writes: **“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”** I will tell you I consider these words the end result of the prayers and requests we have made to God. As we grasp the majesty and wonder of God for us, His grace and compassion, His desire to save our souls, what more do we need to fret about. God is with us. God is for us. God showers upon us his peace, peace beyond anything this world can give. It is peace that can be calm in the midst of storm. It is peace that soothes as the world erupts. It is peace that just grasps and knows that God will do for me and you exactly what is for our eternal good and life. Most important, it is a peace that settles our hearts, calms our minds with the simple knowledge that Jesus, Jesus is for us! We are being reminded to seek that peace.

I have seen that peace in action. The faithful believer breathing their last and yet joyful to be going home to the Lord. The Christian going in for that chemotherapy or laser treatment knowing that no matter the outcome, God is by their side and holding their hand. The Spouse who loses a loved one and yet gives praise and thanks to God for his saving power, just knowing all will be alright because God is with them. I could go on and on. But I think you get my point. That’s what we have in Jesus!

Powerful words before us. Don’t take them lightly or consider them silly or some sort of made up utopian dream. Here is what we have in our Savior. Here is His peace and marvel for our lives. It says with Paul and the Holy Spirit: **“Rejoice! Rejoice in the Lord always!”** Amen.