

SERMON – PASTOR GREG

4.12.2022

Advent 2. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The sermon is based on Philippians 4: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* Let us pray.

A long time ago I spent two weeks in an abattoir in Adelaide. It was part of my work as a Stock and Station Agent. We were there to see how the animals arrived, how they were killed and how they were processed. There are two stand out memories for me. When cattle are killed, the heads are taken off and processed separately from the body. There was a man taking out the eyes, another the tongue, another the cheek meat until there was only the skull left! Another memory again dealt with heads- this time the heads of sheep. They too would be cut off from the body and sent down a chute into a small room where two men would split the head, take out the brains and pack them. The sheep skull like the skulls of the cattle would then be processed into blood and bone meal. Every now and then when life gets difficult I think of those men in the abattoir. Over the years we all face difficult times. They are part and parcel of living in this fallen world. What do we do in the difficult times?

Two thousand years ago the Apostle Paul was in prison- possibly in Rome in the year 61 AD. He wrote a letter to the church in Philippi- in northern Greece. He himself had been the one preaching when a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth had her heart opened by God and she and her household were baptised (Acts 16:14). Paul was forced to flee but a gathering of believers- a congregation- a church was started. In his letter Paul had a few main points:

1. He thanked them for their financial support of him in prison.
2. He encouraged them to stand firm in the face of increasing persecution.
3. He encouraged them to always REJOICE.
4. And he encouraged them to humility and unity. Because even in then, in the very early church there was division.

Today is the Second Sunday of Advent. The readings challenge us to be ready for the Second Coming of Christ by our repentance, our faith and our good works and the reality of judgement. Always remember that JUDGEMENT concerns RIGHTING WRONGS as well as punishment.

But how can Paul call others to rejoice in the midst of dark days? How was he able to rejoice as he sat confined in prison?

1:21-24: *For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far...* Paul had the absolute confidence that his future was heaven, indeed he himself had already been taken up into heaven (2 Cor 12). He had no doubt that all that we experience here on earth are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8). Rejoice!

1:29: *For it has been given to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for/with him.* Christ suffered, we too will suffer for following him. This is the stone cold reality. Rejoice?

2:12: *My dear friends...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you.* Salvation can never be earned- it is gift- grace- always. But we are called to respond in faith, doing the good works which God has prepared for us to do (Eph 2:10). Rejoice in the work God has for you, knowing that He is with you and in you as you work.

3:20,21: *Our citizenship is in heaven...and (Christ) will transform our lowly bodies, so that they will be like his glorious body.* We are citizens of Australia and more- much more- we are citizens of heaven. And Christ will change these bodies of death and decay into glorious bodies that will last for ever. Rejoice!

4:6: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* And you will receive the hugely abundant peace of God and He will safely keep your hearts and minds in His Son Jesus Christ. No one and no thing can snatch you out of your Father's hand. You can leave but He will never leave you. Rejoice.

4:8. As we hear these last words remember that Paul was in prison: *Finally, brothers (and sisters) whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is righteous, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable- consider these things.* Focus on them, keep them in your minds and hearts because they all preach Jesus Christ. He is true, he is noble, he is righteous, he is pure, he is lovely, he is worthy of our worship and praise.

In good times and in difficult times we can always rejoice because we know that through faith in Christ Jesus we belong to God. Now and forever. Amen.