

Malachi 3: 1-4; Philippians 4: 4-7

What a contrast in the readings today – such rejoicing and such destruction ... **‘Again I Say Rejoice – who can stand on the day of his coming.’** Rejoicing and Destruction, sounds a bit like life with small children ...

But what are we supposed to focus on in these two passages?

It would be so easy to say: “well, let’s rejoice, what have we got to rejoice about?” and go down that route – but let’s look at the destruction first – let’s go for a bit of fire shall we ...

The destruction. The refiner’s fire, the launderer’s soap ... **‘Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.’**

Actually, there’s a lot to rejoice in here ... Reading around this passage it’s clear that we are talking about the day of the Lord’s coming, the Messiah’s coming – Christ’s coming, both the first time and the second time. And actually this is good news.

This destruction, this fire, this cleansing of the world – this destruction on the day no one could stand – if you look carefully you’ll notice it’s directed at evil, at sin, at the wicked.

Great – let’s rejoice – let’s think: “oh, ok – so it’s not for us”... God’s getting rid of: “Them out there”!

Well, yes, and no. Actually who can stand? Who can endure? Well no-one. And that is the point, none of us are good enough – all of us have done things wrong.

But, as I said before: **sin is serious, but God’s grace is greater.**

A refiner’s fire takes those bits out of the metal that aren’t gold ... takes out the bits that cause blemish or fault and entirely removes them to make pure gold.

A launderer’s soap cleans off those dark spots, blemishes and cleans up the material – that is the point of these things surely! This means then that it isn’t entirely destroyed – the item is just changed, refined, purified. And this passage is asking – who can do this but the coming Messiah? We can’t do this on our own – we need God – we need Jesus – we need the cross – we need forgiveness – we need grace, all of us, everyone. None of us can do this by ourselves.

And God himself says: **“The one you are seeking will come ... You who revere my name – the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays and you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.”**

Revere the Lord – honour the Lord, worship the Lord for it is through him you are saved, refined, cleansed and restored. There’s our rejoicing! See you knew it was coming ... so this leads us to the Philippians passage: **“rejoice in the Lord – always.”** And it must be important as Paul writes it twice – **“again I say – rejoice!”**

Joy is a common theme in both the Old and the New Testament – it’s giving thanks for salvation at God’s hands, or God’s love, God’s presence – the birth of a Saviour or as in the lost sheep or coin joy over repentance – Joy is rooted in the love and the faithfulness of God. Rejoicing in the Lord in his love and in his faithfulness – because he loves you, and is faithful.

And then he switches to what this rejoicing looks like in practice, and despite what you might think, it isn’t necessarily about happiness! Instead it’s about gentleness. It’s about taking situations in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving to God.

But this gentleness isn't a passive gentleness – it's not an: "oh do whatever" kind of gentleness it's about how you act, how you speak and how you speak up. You can defend something or stand firm in faith either aggressively: "You're wrong, and going to hell" ... or gently: "you know, that's a really interesting thought, but actually I believe"

How you behave and act with those who you disagree with is important, just as important as how you are with those you get on with – and in fact says a lot about your character! Seek to be gentle.

It's interesting here that he says: "**do not be anxious about everything**" before pointing to prayer – suggesting to me, I think, that there are things to be anxious about – things that are going to be difficult, things that are going to be a bit tricky or hard to deal with – and I think actually it's a very realistic picture of rejoicing ... a picture of rejoicing in our salvation, of rejoicing in our forgiveness, cleansing, freedom, healing, but also recognising that 'being happy' isn't the only element of rejoicing!

Instead, rejoicing is gentleness, thanksgiving and prayer.

So what am I saying in all this? I wanted to say that just because you don't feel "happy" or just because you feel down-trodden or fed up with all this Covid stuff and a tricky Christmas and uncertain New Year, it doesn't mean that you've lost your "rejoicing"! Rejoicing just needs to look a little different! Don't hide how you are feeling. Paul is in prison writing these words but he is rejoicing ... **Rejoicing in all circumstances.**

Instead bring your requests in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving to God. That's not hiding, it's not beating around the bush – it's saying: '**this is my request, this is my petition – God help!**' So this is bringing those concerns, those worries before God – crying out for an end to Covid, being honest about how you are doing and building each other up in Jesus' name. And to look for those things to still be thankful for in the midst of everything going on – to be thankful for the little things, the bed you woke up in, the food you eat or the church being open – and the big things – your forgiveness, your freedom from sin, your life.

When you start having an attitude of this kind of thankfulness, this kind of rejoicing – you'll begin to get a sense of peace, a sense that transcends all understanding, an unexplainable peace – and this same peace, it is a peace from God, a peace that can help guard our hearts and our minds that keep us in Jesus – this same attitude of rejoicing keeps you going – keeps us moving forwards, keeps us revering and worshiping – keeps us in Christ Jesus ...The one who we wait for in Advent – the Light who was born in that dark stable, Jesus the Light who has conquered the darkness of sin, Jesus the Light who will overcome the pain, and the grief and evil of this world with a refiner's fire and a launderer's soap.

The Messiah – the one we are hoping for.

This advent – seek to rejoice – seek to be gentle, and let it be evident to all – pray, in every situation and be a person of peace ... Somehow it sounds too simple, right?

You know what? Maybe it is. For some I may have left you a little confused how I got from A-B

But then again, take away the complexities of all I've just said you have a simple message : '**the consequence of sin, of wrong doing, of turning from God, is death**' – and death by fire by the sounds of it! Who can stand? Not in our own strength but through the death and resurrection of Jesus – through the love of God – **we can Rejoice** and that rejoicing leads us to look at things differently – with a trust in God at work.

And we will feel a sense of unexplainable peace.

I wonder if you've felt this peace?

Again I say – Rejoice!