

DCF:

What do you rejoice in? Or, in other words, what makes you so happy that you just have to smile and tell someone else all about it? Maybe it was that time in your “glory years” when your high school team won the conference championship. Maybe it was that time she said “yes” to your marriage proposal. Or, was it at the birth of your children or grandchildren? Maybe it was the day you met your weight loss goal, or the day you got that promotion or new job. We look back on those days of rejoicing fondly, remembering how we felt when something so wonderful happened to us.

Today I want you to do a bit of remembering with me. Remember Christmas? Remember celebrating the birth of our Savior, the Light of the world? Remember how joyful the news of a Savior was to us on that day? Remember how you just had to let it out and rejoice at the news? Let’s do it again! Today **“WE REJOICE IN THE LIGHT!”** We rejoice as we see what Christ has done and rejoice that we can live free.

### ***Part One: We see what Christ has done***

Today we go back in time. Isaiah, a prophet of the Lord, is bringing a message of hope to his hearers. Now, to our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears, the land of Zebulun and Naphtali sound a bit strange. Those were two of the 12 tribes of Israel that inherited land in Canaan. These two tribes were located right at the top of Israel and were often the first tribes attacked by enemies. Most of the nations that battled Israel started their attack on the northern border and pushed their way on to Jerusalem. Over the years these two tribes had been decimated and depopulated. Conquerors in those days would relocate the natives to their homeland, and move in some of their citizens. Over time, Galilee had perhaps more non-native than native people. Maybe that’s why Isaiah calls it Galilee of the Gentiles.

Humbled? Decimated? In distress? Oh, in the past, but Isaiah now puts forth a prophecy that this area would be spectacularly honored. ***“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”*** That great light is the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. He would reveal the Lord’s love and the way to eternal life. He would give them relief from the enemies that constantly oppressed them. Oh, we’re not talking about earthly enemies. We’re talking about spiritual enemies, the ones that want to keep us in the gloom and despair of unbelief. And it all started in Galilee of the Gentiles, where Jesus began to teach and heal. What an honor!

Isaiah’s Old Testament hearers struggled with their spiritual enemies and so do we today. Doesn’t it sometimes seem as if we’re living in darkness because of sin? We struggle with the pull of this world. Do this. Buy that. Focus on making your life a happy life. Strive to be your best self. The world wants us to put ourselves at the top of our priority list. Serve yourself first. God calls that selfishness. And our own sinful nature wants us to go along with that. I want to do what makes me happy. I want to live the way that pleases me. I want. I want. I want. How many decisions have we made in life that include the words “I want to”? Meanwhile the devil is right there, egging our sinful nature on. He wants us to live in the darkness of a selfish life, never seeing the light that is from God.

In the midst of this world’s struggle with the darkness of sin a great light has dawned. Isaiah saw it by prophecy. We see it shining in the Word of the Lord. Jesus, the Light of the world, has come to show us something spectacular. He came to fulfill all of God’s demands. You know, the “be perfect because I am perfect” one? He also died to pay for all the times we failed to do just that. That time you gossiped about your neighbor? Paid for. That time you had a hangover and skipped church? Paid for that one, too. That time you fantasized about someone not your marriage partner? Yup, that one too. The times you lied, or cheated or.. well, you get the picture. Jesus paid for all of them and covered your dark life with His perfect life. Because of that, we are perfectly holy in God’s eyes and worthy of a wonderful relationship with Him. Now, we can go to Him at any time, knowing He will hear and answer all our prayers in the way that is best for us. We know He loves us. We know He cares about us. We know, and rejoice!

There are times, are there not, when we rejoice in what Christ has done for us? Isaiah describes a believer’s joy in this way: ***“they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice***

**when dividing the plunder.**”When the job’s done, when the battle’s won, people rejoice. The job of paying for sin, of winning the battle over sin is complete. We have moments of peace in life, knowing that Jesus did it all. And we rejoice. We say thanks in our prayers. We praise Him with our voices in worship. We look for ways to say thanks with our lives.

It’s too bad those moments of peace don’t last long. The devil will always try dragging us back into the slavery of sin. But when those moments come, remember that Jesus has shown us that we can live free.

### ***Part Two: We can live free***

At the end of World War II, there were two dates that meant a lot to Americans. VE day and VJ day. VE day stood for Victory in Europe and VJ day Victory over Japan. Officially, the war had ended. However, there were still pockets of resistance. Skirmishes between the enemy holdouts and the victors would occur for years afterwards, especially in the Pacific. The war was won, but battles still happened.

The ultimate battle between God and sin has been won, but we still skirmish with the devil and our own sinful nature on a regular basis. We battle with doubt. Does God really care about me? Am I really a child of God? We battle with the weariness of fighting against sin. We battle with broken relationships and the lure of loving money. We skirmish with our own sinful nature as to our purpose in life. To please the Lord or to please myself? Whether we want to admit it or not, we’ve been attacked more times that we remember.

But... you can live free from doubt. In fact, that’s what God wants you to do. God wants us to remember what He has revealed to us by the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. Your Lord has always stood by your side. He has always wanted to strengthen you in your skirmish with sin. He has always wanted to reload your spiritual weapons so that you can defeat the devil’s attacks and live free.

There once was a soldier who went on patrol with just one clip of ammunition for his rifle. His sergeant told him to take more, but the soldier didn’t want to carry the extra weight. He didn’t think he would need to fire his rifle all that much, since all they were doing was recon work. So, he disobeyed his sergeant and took only what he thought he would need. Well, you can guess what happened. They were caught in an ambush, and he quickly ran out of ammo. What do you think happened to him?

Jesus has shattered the yoke, the bar, the rod of sin. We are now free to live for Him, giving Him the honor and glory that He so richly deserves. But, sin hasn’t given up. It still attacks us and we find ourselves in skirmishes with it. The devil still wants to recapture us for his side and kill our God-given freedom. We still battle, even though we’ve been set free. And in that battle, God wants us well supplied with ammo so that we can fight and win.

His Word is our weapon, our ammo. Have you supplied yourself with enough? Do you have a verse of the Bible ready at hand when a particular temptation attacks you? Do you have a defense plan for sin? Here’s what I mean. You know what particular sin attacks you more than another. Look up a Bible passage that confronts that sin and memorize it. Write it down in your note app and look at it often. Then, when you have that particular passage for that particular sin, go on to the next one and do the same thing. Each passage you memorize is one more bullet in your clip. You see, Christ has set us free from sin and wants to keep it that way.

But above all, rejoice! Be glad that Jesus set us free from sin. Be glad that Jesus is always with us and strengthening us in our skirmish with sin. Be glad, and let it show in your voice and in your life. Rejoice by yourself. Rejoice with your fellow warriors. We are free in Christ.

I hope you have many happy memories that you can revisit whenever you want. Memories that cause you to rejoice. I also pray that your happiest memory, the one that gives you the most joy, is the memory of the light of the world, Jesus Christ. When we remember what Christ has done and how He wants us to live free from sin and guilt, why, then **“WE REJOICE IN THE LIGHT!”**

AMEN