

## Rejoice in Your Hope

Romans 12:12a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Most of us are in the same boat, really. We've all adopted certain roles that we've been given in our society, whatever your job is or whatever your relationship with those you live with is, and we've taken on certain attitudes. Really, in order just to relate to other people and in order to operate in this world. All of us have done that in different ways.

We have taken on certain functions, certain roles, we've adopted certain attitudes that enable us to function in our society. But most of us are in the same boat in that though we've done that deep, deep down in the privacy of our own hearts where nobody else can see we often wonder, I wonder what is the right basic attitude to take to life.

I mean, we see different ones of us expressing different attitudes, some have critical attitudes, some have hostile attitudes, some of us have light hearted attitudes, some of us have pessimistic attitudes. And often we ourselves experience all of those, all in the same hour sometimes. But deep, deep down in our hearts, I think all of us wonder, "Boy, it would be just great to know what normality is, what is normal, what is a right and appropriate attitude to take in the light of reality, that's what I'd love to know. I'd just love to know in the light of whatever reality is behind this universe, what is a right attitude for me to have. Boy, I'd love to know that. I'd just love to know if there was some basic, overall attitude that I ought to have in my life, that would accord with reality."

It's a wee bit like the economy, you know, you kind of feel don't you if you could get Paul Volker and President Reagan and Tip O'Neill and Baker and the top experts from Wall Street into this room back here and you could say to them, "Okay, now level with us. When are the interest rates going down?" We'd love to, if we could just get somebody to tell us what's going to happen with the interest rates. Boy, that would help us tremendously in a lot of decisions and attitudes that we're going to take this week.

It's a bit like that, isn't it? You kind of feel it would be great if we could get some person who knows how things are finally going to turn out here in this world and in our lives, if they could tell us what that's going to be so that we then could adopt a right attitude that would be appropriate for all the situations that come along.

In other words, it would just be great wouldn't it if whatever happens in the armament race, whatever happens in regard to famine and natural disasters, whatever is going to happen in the international situation, whatever is going to happen in the whole development of computers, it would be so great wouldn't it if we knew some person who knows what is happening in the midst of it all, who could tell us what attitude we should take that would be in accordance with that reality.

Don't you think the longer you live, the more you feel that? I mean the longer we live, each year brings into our life, doesn't it, hours, sometimes days, sometimes weeks, sometimes months that we have spent or wasted in utterly inappropriate attitudes. I mean, many of us have a tremendous anxiety in certain job situations and we wasted hours, at times wasted days, at times wasted weeks and months in that attitude.

In regard to unrequited love, we've spent hours and weeks and months at times in attitudes of expectation and hope that were utterly unrealistic. They weren't in accordance with what reality was at all. I just thought this morning when I was thinking about saying this to you, you know, it suddenly struck me that the house we're living in was built in the year in which I was ordained as a little Methodist minister in 1960 in Dublin and yet the dear God had it all organized and when I think of how many different attitudes, so many and so contradictory that I have expressed between 1960 and 1982, they bore no relationship to reality at all. And don't you think that many of us are in that same boat?

We've gone through the gamut of attitudes of all kinds and we think, "Boy it would just be so good if we knew of some attitude that we should adopt in all situations that would not be stupid, you know, that would not be out of accordance with what final reality was, that would not be kind of false or silly or wrong."

Loved ones, there is a dear person who has told us what that attitude is. There is a dear person who knows the way things are going to turn out and He has told us what attitude we should adopt day-by-day. And if we could speak to Bill Wallace or Roger or Gus Young or our old grandparents or parents who are now in the immediate presence of God and we could ask them too, "Look, in the light of what you see, you can see everything now, you can understand it all, you know what's going to happen in the midst of the whole international mess, you know what's going to happen in our own personal lives, you know what's going to happen to our families, what attitude do you think we should have when we get up in the morning and when we go to bed at night?", and they're all going to answer the same thing: "Joy!" That's it.

Joy! You should be happy. You should be delighted. You should be filled with joy, that's it and you know I know what you're thinking. You're thinking what I thought when I read this verse that we're studying. I thought well wait a minute, there are some times when sure you kind of have joy at a wedding or when you get a new car or when you are on a fishing trip or when vacation is just around the corner, sure there are times when joy is appropriate, I can see that. There are times when I do feel joy but there are a hundreds of times where anxiety and worry and depression are the only right attitude.

Loved ones, our Creator's word to us on this matter is so categorical and so absolute and so dogmatic that I'd like you to look at it for yourselves. It's expressed in another verse other than the one we're studying, in Philippians chapter 4 and verse 4.

Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always", and you know we have a tendency to say, "No, it's impossible. Sometimes, but not always", and then you read the next line, "Again I will say, rejoice", and we tend to say, "No, there are things that happen in this world, there are apprehensions I have about the future, there are uncertainties, there are tragedies that often fill us with worry and anxiety."

Philippians 4:6, "Have no anxiety about anything". Now, I think we Irish, if you read James Joyce and the rest of our pitiful countrymen, I think we Irish are as good at crying in our beer as any of you Americans are and so I am as skeptical about this as any of you but loved ones, it is straight and clear from God's heart.

Do you remember Rich Little's impressions of political figures? I can't even imitate Irish people so

I can't imitate American people but he did one you remember, of Hubert Humphrey and he would put on of course Hubert Humphrey's voice and they always, of course, were making fun of Hubert Humphrey's optimism you remember and boundless bounce and happiness. So he had this particular line, he said Hubert would get up in the morning and would look around at Muriel, his wife and would say, "Whoopee!" And dear love Hubert Humphrey, you can believe that that's what he would do whether you agree with it politically or not, you can believe that's what he would do.

Strange, though it is, that's exactly what our Creator says we should do, that's it. This dear Father of ours that has seen more pain and agony than any of us will ever see, this dear Father of ours that has seen His Son painted as a man of sorrow, dying and bleeding to death on the Cross, this dear Father of ours that sees every baby in Bombay that is going to die today, that sees every prostitute in New York that is going to commit fornication today. This dear Father that sees the millions of Armenians as well as the Jews that were destroyed, this dear Father that sees the little mother crying over her baby in India at this moment, this dear Father still says, "Rejoice, be happy. Again, I will say rejoice."

Loved ones, it's a command. It's not advice. God says, "Rejoice, and again I will say rejoice", and that's a command. Loving God is not an option. It's a command, "Thou shall love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart and soul and strength and mind." It's not an option, it's a command. Loving your neighbor is not an option, it's a command, "Love your neighbor as yourself".

Rejoice is not an option, it's a command. Rejoice! If you don't rejoice, you're on the same level as committing any other sin, fornication, adultery, stealing, lying, because our dear Creator tells us plainly and directly, "Rejoice, always, and again I will say rejoice". Now if you say, "There's no basis for that. Unemployment is higher than it has been for decades. The international situation is worse in a more widespread way than it has been for decades. Our own economic situation is tragic. Our families are falling apart. What is the basis for rejoicing?"

Loved ones, it's in the verse that we're studying today. Romans 12:12, "Rejoice in your hope". Rejoice in hope. In fact the Greek means, "As far as hope goes, rejoice, as regards hope, rejoice", and maybe you say, "Ah, that I understand. That's the only thing that gets me through the present struggles that I face. The thought that it can't go on forever, it's bound to get better. I understand that, yeah, yeah. I rejoice because I have hopes that it will get better. I understand that, in fact, to tell you the truth, TGIF is a basic principle in my life, really. It's as if I live my life, plan little treats and surprises along the way so I kind of get through Monday because I think well, Friday is coming and I can get through Friday because the weekend's coming and I can get through the middle of the week because my birthday is coming and that's it. I understand that. I see, you rejoice because of the little hopes that you have and my life is full of little hopes. I plan little hopes, little treats for myself that help me to kind of keep a light heart and get a little charge of anticipation. That's right, I understand that. Every cloud has a silver lining and where there's life, there's hope and 'a stitch in time saves nine' and that's it."

Well, loved ones, that isn't the hope that's talked about here at all, and aren't you glad it isn't, because those little hopes are so frustrating and so deceptive and so man-made. We know we're kind of bluffing ourselves. You know it's like hiding a kind of Coca Cola in the back of the refrigerator so that you surprise yourself by finding it.

You know it's a put up job and really it's just a game you're playing with yourself. It's not that kind of hope loved ones, it isn't. It's a different hope. You may say, "Well, I didn't know there

were two kinds of hopes." There are and they're both mentioned in Romans 4, if you like to look at it and it's talking about Abraham, you remember.

Romans 4:18, "In hope, he believed against hope". See that? In hope, he believed against hope. Now what is the hope he believed against? Well in Romans 4:19, "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body which was as good as dead because he was about 100 years old or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb." That was human hope and that's what we're talking about when we're talking about the Coke in the refrigerator or the little treats or TGIF, we're talking about confidence that we have based on our perception of the outward human circumstances and how we think they might turn around favorably for our benefit. That's human hope and that human hope is the most frustrating thing that you could experience, the recession has bottomed out, will bottom out, will never bottom out. We've been at all stages.

Almost every economist has tried a different one. The interest rates will go down when the budget deficit is eliminated, when fears of inflation are eliminated, when the tomatoes become red almost. We try everything, every kind of human hope and they're all equally changing and tempering, frustrating, disappointing, self-deceptive, the only certainty about human hope is its uncertainty.

The only guarantee about human hope that tries to look at the circumstances and see how they might turn around from a human angle to our favor is that there is no guarantee. Loved ones, human hope is hopeless and that isn't the hope that is talked about here in this verse in Romans. The hope that is talked about is the hope mentioned if you look at that same chapter, Romans 4:21.

Romans 4:21, "Fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised". That's divine hope. You rejoice in a complete confidence that God is going to do what he has promised to do and God says, "You're to live on the basis of that rejoicing everyday. You're to go rejoicing everyday, not on the basis of human hope, the way things look to your outward eye but on the basis of what I have said I will do for you." Let's look, loved ones, at one of the things he has said he would do for every one of us in this room.

Philippians 4:19, "And my God will supply every need of yours, according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus". That's what God has promised each one of us in this room. And you waken up in the morning and you think of your needs because the elemental spirits of the universe flood you with a general feeling of godlessness that you're on your own and so you waken up in the morning and you think of the repairs that have to be made to the car and you think of the bills that have to be paid and you think of the relationships in your job situation that aren't right and that are most uncomfortable and you are flooded with all those needs and God says, "Those things are permitted by Me, those inadequacies are permitted by Me to come into your life so that you realize that you can only live it with Me. I want you the moment that happens, to immediately turn your eyes up to Me and say, 'Father, I thank You that You are going to supply every need of mine this day and Lord, I set my eyes on that.'"

Abraham would have been lost if he had set his eyes on this old woman because she was 80 or 90 and if he had set his eyes on his old body which was almost 100 years of age. Loved ones, if he had done that, he would have concluded one thing: that both of them would be in their caskets probably before the end of that year and yet, was that reality? Was that reality? Is that what happened? Is that what God had planned for them? Is that what he had already done?

So, when you and I let ourselves be bluffed by these elemental spirits of the universe that pretend

that there is no dear Father who loves you and loves me and cares for us and has provided for us, when those elemental spirits of the universe blast in upon our minds and bring us into black depression before we've even got out of bed, loved ones, there's no reality. It bears no relationship to reality at all.

There is only one reality and that is, "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus", and your God, your dear Father, expects you to believe him. Which isn't too much in a way? I mean what have you that he has not given you? What have any of us that he has not given us? He has been pretty faithful with the rising of the sun. He has been pretty faithful with these bodies of ours. You know what your body has taken. I know what mine has taken.

I mean there's every good, logical reason for believing that he is going to continue like that -- that he is not in the business of saying, "As long as the earth remain, summer and harvest shall not fail" and that has never failed. There's always been a summer, there's always been a winter, and there's always been a harvest somewhere in this world that has enabled us to continue to live.

It's not likely that he will start breaking His promises now and he has said to you, "I'll supply every need you have, according to my riches in Christ Jesus and I expect you to deal with Me not as if I am a crook, that you'll believe that and you'll have the joy of it and the lightness of heart of it only when you get the thing in your hand. I'll expect you to believe me. I have given numerous proofs of my faithfulness. Now I am telling you, this day I will supply every need of yours. Now look up, look away from Sarah, look away from your old body, look away from the repairs that have to be done to the car, look away from the bills that have to be paid, look away from the miserable situation at work, and look at Me. Rejoice. Rejoice in Me. Be happy. Smile, look up!" Loved ones, that's what he means. And I am the same as you. I agree.

If you look at the outward circumstances, you wouldn't get out of bed, you wouldn't. You'll put the bedclothes over your head and stay there but do you see what he is saying? He is saying, "Human hope wouldn't do you any good anyway, even if it looked good. You've got up so many days, you've thought it's going to go well today and it hasn't. Get off that completely. Take your eyes off those things that you see and rejoice in sure confidence that I am going to keep my promises to you."

Loved ones, it's the same with another dear promise that is just solid and good you know, it's First Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation", and the Greek word means "trial" also you know, temptation, attempting to do evil, but usually it's a trial you remember, the trial that tempts you to lose your peace you remember, that's what trial is and to shift for yourself you know, whoever you hurt.

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength" (or tried beyond your strength) "but with the temptation (or with the trial) will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it." That's it.

For you come into the situation where everything is breaking apart and there's strife in the family or there's strife in the office or the company has closed down or the bill wasn't paid that you thought have been paid or you find you have to suddenly change your whole way of life. God says, "Take your eyes off that because this thing that I am allowing to come to you, some people have intended it for your harm but I have intended it for your good and actually all it is, is, it's a signal to you that there is some new grace on it's way to you from Me and I want you to rejoice. I want you not to look at the black, gloomy figure that is closest to you but look at the bright figure that is right behind him."

"So whenever you see a black, gloomy thing, know that I am on my way. I am coming right through and I'll be through to you in a minute and there'll be new grace and you'll be able to do this and you'll be able to tackle it and you'll be able to do all things through my Son who strengthens you and I want you to fix your eyes on that." Now is it too much to ask you to do that?

Really, isn't it ridiculous? Is it too much to ask you to take the word of your dear maker, my dear maker who has made us and has given us so many beautiful things and has turned out things so wonderfully in the past for us, in ways that we could not believe? And those things that did not turn out outwardly good, He gave us grace and happiness in our heart despite this? Is it too much, loved ones, to ask you to take your eyes off the trial and to stop fiddling around with that stupid human hope trying to make the things look good, trying to see the silver lining behind the dark cloud, trying to say that where there's life there's hope, trying to be stoical about it?

Is it too much to ask you to take your eyes right off those human things and the outward appearance of things and your perception of what is likely to happen from a human viewpoint and instead set your eyes on your dear Father who has said there's no trial come upon you beyond what you're able to bear? "I have not sent it to you but I filtered it. You're down here. I filtered it through my own hands. I've looked down and seen John can face that, Mary can't face that so I closed my fingers there. Jean can face that so I'll open my fingers there and my son, my daughter, I am filtering all these things through my hands and there's none of them that you're not able to bear and I'll tell you the thing will hardly have hit you but my strength will hit you at the same time and will lift you up and you'll be able to face it", and our dear Father says, "Rejoice in that hope every day in your life."

When you get up in the morning, rejoice in that hope. When you go to bed at night, rejoice in that hope. Hope - a vague hope? No. A sure confidence that God will do what he has promised to do for you. That's it, loved ones, and that's why the mark of all the saints is joy, boundless joy.

Saint Francis had one of his followers who kept turning cartwheels. He was so filled with joy, that's right and that's what it is. The human situation is hopeless but has always been hopeless. Even when it's been best it's been hopeless, apart from this dear Father who has made us, who is allowing all these things to come to us to wean us off depending on circumstances in the world and get us to start rejoicing on the basis of His promise and His word. Really you can see that hope is an expression of your faith. It's an expression of your confidence that God does love you and that he is going to enable you to face whatever and that's the wonder of it, of course.

For us, there is no uncertainty about the international situation. For us, there is no uncertainty about whether the world will go up in fire. For us, there is no uncertainty about whether things will get better or get worse. There is absolute certainty, absolute confidence that at the end, God will work all things according to the counsel of His will and will sum up all things in Christ and you and I will be together in the Father's presence with as many other loved ones as we can haul out of this raging sea. That's why he says, "Rejoice", and loved ones, we're just mean, miserly obstinate little critters.

If because something bad happens on the way to that we get all worked up, I mean we are, aren't we? We're just the meanest most miserly creatures that you could ever imagine. If on the way to that sure hope and with His promises that all the intermediate stages will be taken care of, we concentrate on the things that look back.

So loved ones, it is a command. I hate to disappoint those of you who love to cry in your beer, you know, but it is a command, "Rejoice." That's what God says when you and I don't rejoice. I was a pessimist. My dad was a worrier. I was built to be a worrier. I am with you but it's downright sin.

No, don't you say, "Oh, it's weakness, it's weakness", it's not weakness. It's sin. It's turning your eyes to the world hoping that it will work right and God has said it will never work right and that's why I have overcome the world in my Son. So rejoicing is a matter of obedience, it really is, and all you who cry and worry and get anxious and take tranquilizers and get touched with tension, God says, "Rejoice because I know what's going to happen to you and believe Me, it's good. It's good." Now do you believe? If you do, you'll rejoice.