

There's nothing harder in baseball than being called upon to pinch-hit. After sitting on the bench for inning after inning, a pinch-hitter typically has less than a minute to get ready to face a 95 mile-per-hour fastball. And of course, if you're being used as a pinch-hitter, the game has probably reached a crucial stage. It takes special talent to be a pinch-hitter.

Only one man had what it took to be our pinch-hitter: the God-man Jesus Christ. He took our burden of sin off of us and carried it himself to the cross. He suffered punishment we should have suffered. He pinch-hit for us in a situation where we never could have succeeded.

When a pinch-hitter comes through in the clutch, baseball fans can't help but cheer. Their team's fortunes are improved because of the efforts of one man in a key situation.

Our reaction to our Savior's pinch-hitting prowess is much the same. "Rejoice in the Lord always," Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians. "I will say it again: Rejoice!" (4:4). That's the main reason why we gather together as Christians: to rejoice. If it were up to us, we would fail. We couldn't ever offer God the perfect life he demands of us. But our divine pinch-hitter came through, living a perfect life and offering that life to God on our behalf.

What joy that gives us no matter our earthly circumstances! Our Savior came through in the clutch. He has made us winners! The trophy presentation is but a few days, weeks, months or years away for each of us -- and the celebration will never, ever end.

Prayer: Lord, to you I confess all that I have done wrong: the words I shouldn't have spoken, the acts I shouldn't have committed, the important things I've left undone. Thank you for carrying my load of guilt for me. In the peace and freedom that only you can give, let me serve you better in my joy at your saving work. In your name I pray. Amen.

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