

Joyful Peace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 May 2018

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, Philippians chapter 4, as we said, we're looking at verses 1 to 9 this evening, but if we could take us our text, the words of verse 4, where Paul writes to the Philippians, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. It was once said that the best thing about ministry is people, but the worst thing about ministry is people. And you know, it's so true because without people, there would be no one to minister to. Without people, you wouldn't have a church. Without people, there wouldn't be brothers and sisters in Christ. Without people, you wouldn't see anyone coming to know Jesus. Without people, you would never see anyone growing in their faith in Jesus

Christ. And so it's true. The best thing about ministry is people. But sometimes the worst thing about the ministry can be people. Because when people with different backgrounds and different upbringings and different temperaments and different personalities and different capabilities, when all these different types of people come together and they're all sinners, none of them are perfect. They're all a work in progress. They all have lots to learn about Jesus and one another.

And when they all come together, there's always the possibility of a clash or friction or conflict. But everyone must focus upon what they have in common, not upon what makes them different.

Because what they have in common as Christians, what they have in common is Jesus Christ. And when we focus upon Jesus, and when we see that each member of the church is created in the image and likeness of God, and they're loved by Jesus, and they're redeemed because of Jesus, they're righteous like Jesus, and they're being sanctified through Jesus, when that's our focus, instead of the negative, you know, we will seek to live with that joyful peace within the church of Jesus Christ.

And you know, there's no church in the world that is immune to conflict or difficulty or even division. They often say that if you find the perfect church, don't join it, because you'll only spoil it.

[2 : 4 5] And that's because where sinners are to be found, there is the potential for conflict. And sadly, such turbulence within a congregation, it can threaten the witness of the church and the effectiveness of its ministry. Therefore, whatever conflict arises, it must be addressed properly, it must be resolved in a God-honoring manner. And you know, that's what we see here in these verses of chapter 4. Paul is addressing an issue of conflict within the church in Philippi.

And you know, if struggling with issues of false teaching from outside the church, if that wasn't enough to deal with, they were also struggling to deal with issues of conflict inside the church. Because here we read about two women in the church, and they were at war with one another. But Paul calls them out. Paul addresses them by name. And so what we have in this passage is a lesson on conflict management. And Paul seeks to remind us of the need for the church of Jesus Christ to have joyful peace with one another. We're to have joyful peace with one another. And Paul gives us this lesson by saying to us three things. He says, be peaceful, be prayerful, and be practical.

That's the three things he says. Be peaceful, be prayerful, and be practical. So let's look at the first thing Paul says. He says, be peaceful. Be peaceful. Now look at verse 1.

He says, therefore my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat Iodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also through companion. Help these women who have laboured side by side with me in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. And you'll notice that before Paul addresses the conflict within the church in Philippi, he reminds the Philippians of what he has already just said, and then he reminds them what they mean to him as a congregation. So Paul reminds the Philippians of what he has just said, and he does that by using the word therefore. It's a word that we would often overlook, but Paul always uses the word therefore in order to draw upon what he has just said, what he's just taught, all this teaching he's just given, so that what he's about to say, it carries more weight with it and it carries more emphasis with it. Because Paul is about to address, as we can see, he's addressing a very sensitive and a very delicate issue of conflict and division within a congregation. But by reminding the Philippians of what he has just said, back in chapter 2, he reminded them about the humility of Jesus. Paul exhorted the Philippians to have the mind of Christ, which is a mind of humility, it's a mind of obedience, it's a mind of submission to God's will. And then moving on, later in chapter 2, Paul looked at the progression of a

Christian and he said, you're not the finished article, you're to work, you're a work in progress, you have to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. But then more than that, we saw last week in chapter 3, that as Christians we have a righteousness that's not our own, because it's a righteousness that has come from God through faith in Jesus Christ. And you know what Paul is doing here, it's absolutely brilliant. Because in the chapters leading up to addressing this very sensitive issue of conflict in the church, Paul is reminding the Philippians that they're to be humble like Christ, they're to remember that they're not perfect themselves, and that they're to see every Christian as righteous as Christ himself. And Paul's point is that when we deal with people with that perspective, we will realize that there's no reason to quarrel with them. There's no reason to argue with them.

[7 : 03] There's no reason to hold grudges against one another. And it's such a brilliant point to make, because it should teach us to look at one another differently, and to treat one another like Christ would treat us. Because we're to be humble like Jesus. We're to remember that each and every one of us, we aren't perfect. But we're all precious to God, and we're all as righteous as God's own Son.

And knowing that, it should be enough to make us realize that conflict or friction or intentionally ignoring people, it is so unlike Jesus, and it is so unbecoming of a Christian. And you know, that's where Paul begins. That's where he begins his address, to be peaceful. He reminds the Philippians of what he's just said in chapters 2 and 3. But then he reminds them of how much they mean to him. He says, therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. Paul addresses the Philippians with such endearing terms.

And it ought to show us the pastor's heart that Paul had for the congregation in Philippi. And that when he's broaching what is sometimes a difficult and a very sensitive topic, Paul wants the Philippians to know that what he's saying to them is being said to them out of love and warmth and with genuine affection. Affection so that they will grow and develop in their faith and in their witness, and that they will give God the glory in everything that they do. And you know, notice how many times Paul uses the word my in verse 1. He says, my brothers and sisters, my joy and crown, my beloved. Paul considers the Philippians to be precious people, and he wants the best for them.

He doesn't want them arguing with one another. He doesn't want them falling out with one another. He doesn't want conflict and division between them. No, Paul wants them to love one another.

Paul wants them to remember that they're brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul wants them to humbly serve one another and serve the community that they're part of. Because disputes and divisions and discord and dissensions, well, they never serve for a good witness in the church of Jesus Christ.

[9 : 40] Christ. That's why Paul exhorts the Philippians. He says to them, stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. They're to seek to uphold their Christian witness as a congregation and as a church. And you know, this is so relevant to us because the most damaging witness to the cause of Christ, it's not a dead church. It's a divided church. Because division, it never serves as a good witness for the cause of Christ. And so, you know, having set the scene, having reminded the Philippians of what he said already and what they mean to him as a congregation, Paul, he goes into verse 2, he addresses the problem that was festering within the congregation of Philippians. And you know, he just puts his finger right on the raw nerve and he says, I entreat Iodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Paul literally calls these women out. That's what the word entreat means. It means to call out. And that's what Paul did. He called these women out by name. He said, Iodia and Syntyche. And you know, what's so sad about this situation is that these two women, they are permanently recorded in the word of God for all of the wrong reasons. Their squabble was so serious and so divisive that Paul had to address it publicly in front of the whole congregation. And the thing about these two women is that they were active members in the church of Jesus Christ. They had served the Lord together for many years. Paul says that they even labored side by side with me in the gospel. But sadly, their quarrel was now threatening the strength and witness of the congregation. But you have to notice that Paul doesn't just give Iodia and Syntyche. He doesn't just give them a telling off. He doesn't just call them out and leave them there. No, Paul says, look what he says in verse three.

Yes, I ask you also. And the you there is singular, meaning that Paul is addressing the whole congregation in Philippi. He's addressing them as as one body. And Paul says, I ask you as a congregation, as a true companion, he says, help these women. And you know, the language that Paul uses here, it's so beautiful because Paul encourages the congregation. He says to them, don't exclude these women. Don't exclude and disregard Iodia and Syntyche. He's saying get alongside them, support them, encourage them, seek reconciliation between them. Bear them up before the Lord.

That's what he's saying to them, encourage them. And you know, I love this phrase that Paul uses to describe the role of the congregation. He calls them the true companion. Or as the AB puts it, the true yoke fellow. And you know, with that phrase, true companion or true yoke fellow, Paul is seeking to illustrate that as a congregation, there's not to be disputes and divisions and discord going on within the church. They're to remember that like two oxen that are yoked together, he says, two oxen that are yoked together pulling a plough. He says they're to work together in unity. Because as you know, if one ox is pulling one way and one ox is pulling the other way, the plough will never move forward. And if there's division between brothers and sisters, then the congregation must get them alongside and support them and encourage them and bear them up so that they will be reconciled to one another. Because until there is reconciliation, the work of the gospel will be hindered and the fallow ground can't be ploughed. And so Paul is reminding us here, as he was reminding the church in Philippi, he reminds us that in times of disunity, we need to seek to have joyful peace with one another. We are to be peaceful. That's the first thing he says. We're to be peaceful. But then he says, we're also to be prayerful.

We're also to be prayerful. So look at verse four. He says, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness or your gentleness be known to everyone.

[14 : 36] The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. So having directly addressed the sad situation of this conflict between these two women, Yodia and Syntyche, Paul reminds the congregation in Philippi that as Christians, they are to rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say it. Rejoice. And Paul says this because disputes and divisions and discord with other people, that can certainly steal our Christian joy. These things can rob us of our joyful peace and bring many concerns and many worries into our life. But you know, there are also many other things that can steal our joy in the Lord. There are many worries and anxieties and doubts and illnesses and sorrows that can steal our Christian joy. There may be past problems, present concerns, future fears, and they can all rob us of our Christian joy. And these things which are genuine, they're real, sometimes very personal, they're real, sometimes very personal, they can steal our

Christian joy. And they can steal our Christian joy because when we're going through them, we can take our eyes off Jesus and become more focused upon the problem. And that's not intentional, but sometimes that's what can happen. These providences which come into our lives so suddenly and sometimes so unexpectedly, and before we know it, we've lost our Christian joy. But you know what, Paul reminds the Philippians, and what he reminds us is that even though we may encounter conflict or have doubts or worries that would attempt to steal our Christian joy, Paul says that we can still have that Christian joy while we're sorrowing, suffering, or serving. And that's why Paul gives this exhortation. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say it, rejoice. Paul reminds us that despite our circumstances, we're to rejoice in the Lord. We're to rejoice in our salvation. We're to rejoice in all that we face and all that we struggle with. But more than that, he says we're to be gentle.

Paul says in verse 5, let your reasonableness or let your gentleness be known to everyone, for the Lord is at hand. And you know, Paul's point is such a valid one because you know, when there's something bothering us, or something is worrying us, or something is robbing us of our peace and our Christian joy, it can cause us to become angry, maybe sometimes bitter. It can cause us to say things that we don't really mean, or we can react to things in a completely uncharacteristic manner. When there's a strain upon us and it's robbing us of our joyful peace, tensions can be heightened and emotions can be all over the place.

But Paul exhorts us to keep rejoicing despite what's going on. And we're to remain gentle in our character. Because you know, as soon as you lose your cool, Paul says you will lose credibility in your Christian witness. As soon as you lose your cool, you will lose credibility in your Christian witness.

And so how do we do this? How do we keep rejoicing despite our circumstances? How do we remain gentle when our life is turned upside down and we have all these pressures upon us and we're being pulled and pushed in every different direction? Well, Paul says, be prayerful. Be prayerful.

[18 : 48] Do not be anxious about anything, he says in verse 6. But in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. And you know, we must always remember where Paul is when he's writing this and what his circumstances are. He's under house arrest, he's chained to a Roman soldier day and night. And he's awaiting to hear if he will live or die.

And yet Paul, he has learned in his circumstances that the only way he's able to rejoice and remain calm is through prayer. And so Paul says to the Philippians that the only way you're going to know peace in the midst of your storm or joy in the midst of sorrow or help in the midst of suffering, the only way that this is possible is through prayer. And Paul encourages, he encourages us not to be anxious about anything. Do not be anxious about anything, whether it's conflict or illness or finance or our own death. Whatever it is, says Paul, do not be anxious. I love the way the authorised version puts it.

Be careful for nothing. Be careful for nothing. In other words, don't be so full of care that it steals your Christian joy. And you know, it's interesting, the word worry comes from an old English word meaning to strangle or to choke. And that's what Paul is saying here. Don't be so full of care that all your cares choke you and strangle you and steal from you, your joy in the Lord. In fact, Paul is saying that your Christian life should be careless because you should be prayerful. Your Christian life should be careless because you should be prayerful. In fact, one commentator, he said, though it may be strange to think of it like this, to be anxious is to be disobedient to God. Worry is a failure to trust that God is in control. Worry is gazing at my problems in self-reliance or self-pity rather than looking to the Lord in dependence. Worry is failure to believe the promises of God and his word.

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't be concerned about issues in our lives in the midst of difficulties. Yet Paul stresses that believers must not be strangled and choked of their joy and their peace.

And of course, while reading that, I thought, well, that's very idealistic, isn't it? But is it realistic? Because for most of us, well, that's easier said than done.

[21 : 57] But Paul says, prayer is the secret of joyful peace. Prayer is the secret of joyful peace.

Because when we make our requests known to God, that's when we will know the peace of God that passes all understanding. And you know, when it comes to prayer, we have to be specific.

Because if the Lord knows everything about us and he knows our heart and he knows what we need for it before we ask it, then we should be specific with our prayers. Not public prayers, but our private prayers.

Whether we're praying for someone, we pray for them in particular. Whether we're confessing our sin, we confess specific sin. Whether we're thanking the Lord for a certain answer to prayer, we should be specific.

Because prayer is the secret to joyful peace. And you know, I always love what the Apostle Peter says in his letter about prayer. He says, Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon him.

[23 : 05] Why? Because he cares for you. Cast all your care upon him, because he cares for you. And I always remember studying in college that verse.

Cast all your cares upon him. It means to throw. And when you throw something, when you throw a ball, you're not only throwing it, you're letting go of it.

Because as soon as you throw it, you've let go of it. And that's what we need to do with all our cares, and all our worries, and all our anxieties. We need to cast them. We need to throw them at the feet of Jesus, and leave them with him.

And I know that's not easy to do, but that's what we're being taught to do here. That we need to let go of these cares, and these worries that choke us, and strangle us.

And we just need to trust the Lord with all our heart. And you know, when we do that, Paul says we are guaranteed that joyful peace, that surpasses all understanding.

[24 : 10] A peace that you just can't describe, or explain to anyone. My friend, prayer is the secret of joyful peace.

And you know, that's what Joseph Scriven discovered for himself. Joseph Scriven, he was born in Ireland in 1820. And in his early 20s, he was engaged to be married.

But on the evening before his wedding, Scriven's fiancée drowned. And this tragedy, coupled with other family relationships, it caused Scriven, he moved to Canada, to become a teacher.

And then in Canada, Scriven, he got engaged for the second time, but sadly, tragedy struck again. His second fiancée, she passed away from illness, shortly before their marriage.

And so not surprisingly, after repeated tragedy, Scriven, he began to experience poor health, financial struggles, and even depression. And they say that to this day, no one knows for sure if Scriven's death was an accident, or suicide.

[25 : 24] But even in all, the troubles that he faced in life, Joseph Scriven wrote his famous hymn in 1855. And he sent it as a letter to his mother, who still lived in Ireland.

The hymn that Joseph Scriven wrote, was, What a Friend We Have in Jesus. And I'm sure you know the words. But I'm going to read them to you, to remind you, of how important prayer is.

He says, What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit.

Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. He asks, Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful? Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness.

[26 : 25] Take it to the Lord in prayer. Are we weak and heavy laden? Cumbered with a load of care? Precious Saviour, still our refuge. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer. In his arms he'll take and shield thee. Thou shall find a solace there. Blessed Saviour, thou hast promised.

Thou wilt all our burdens bear. May we ever, Lord, be bringing all to thee in earnest prayer. Soon in glory bright and clouded, there will be no need for prayer.

Rapture, praise and endless worship will be our sweet portion there. My dear Christian friend, what a friend we have in Jesus.

And if Jesus is this good a friend to us, then let us seek to be prayerful in order that we may obtain that joyful peace which passes all understanding.

[27 : 31] And so in this section, Paul gives us a lesson on conflict management. He reminds us of the need to have joyful peace with one another. And he does so by saying, be peaceful, be prayerful, and lastly, be practical.

Be practical. He says in verse 8, Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. And so in these verses, Paul calls us to apply this teaching of joyful peace.

He's calling us to apply it in our lives. And he says, What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, he says, practice these things.

And you know, it's an important statement because we're all good at taking in information. We're good at absorbing the information that we learn, or we're good at hearing it and receiving it and seeing what's going on.

[28 : 50] We're good at using all our senses, our mind, our heart, our ears, our eyes. But you know, the difficulty we all have is taking that information and converting it to application.

We all know what we have to do, but the difficulty is doing it. But that's why Paul says, practice these things. Live it out.

Apply it in your life. Make this your priority and the God of peace will be with you. He says, if you want to experience joyful peace, the peace that passes all understanding, then you need to be peaceful.

You need to seek peace with your fellow Christian. You need to be prayerful and you need to be practical. If you want to experience that joyful peace, he says, then you need to have a mind that focuses upon Jesus.

And what Paul is saying is that obtaining joyful peace with other people is a battle of the mind. Because as we said, when different types of people come together, when they have different personalities, different capabilities, different temperaments, and they're all sinners, when they come together, none of them is perfect.

[30 : 08] They're all a work in progress. They all have lots to learn about Jesus and about one another. And when they all come together, there's always the possibility of a clash or a conflict. But Paul says that in order to succeed in possessing joyful peace, your mind must not focus upon what makes everyone different.

Your mind must focus upon what you have in common and what we all have in common here tonight. is Jesus. And Paul says, think on these things.

Think on these things. Think on the things, he says, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable.

If there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. And you know, when we focus upon Jesus and see that each member of the church is created in the image and likeness of God, and as we said, if we remember that they're all loved by Jesus, we're redeemed by Jesus, we're righteous like Jesus, and we're all being sanctified through Jesus, when that's our focus instead of the negative, we will seek to live with our joyful peace within the church of Jesus Christ.

And so having given to us a lesson on conflict management and the need to have that joyful peace among one another where we have to be peaceful, we have to be prayerful, and we have to be practical.

[31 : 48] Having given us this lesson, Paul says in verse 9, what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

So may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we give thanks for thy word, thy word that addresses every situation and every circumstance in life.

We thank thee, Lord, that it is the only rule to direct us in how we may glorify and enjoy thee forever. And Lord, that thou wouldst enable us to be peaceful, for thy word reminds us that blessed are the peacemakers.

And Lord, we pray that we would love one another more, that we would serve one another more, that we would be more faithful, more loving, more caring, more compassionate, all to thy glory and to the extension of thy kingdom.

Help us, Lord, to be more prayerful, to pray for one another, to bear one another's burdens, to be, Lord, the salt and the light that we ought to be and to plead, Lord, for the cause that surrounds us.

[33 : 02] For we know that the harvest is plenteous and, Lord, we often feel that the labourers are few, but we are to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he would provide more for his harvest field.

O Lord, bless us, we pray thee then. Help us to apply all that we're learning. Help us to live out thy word to be, Lord, living epistles, seen and read of men, that we, O Lord, would bring glory to thy name and that we might in some small measure bring an extension to the kingdom of Christ.

O Lord, do us good, we ask. Continue with us, we pray, and take away our iniquity. Receive us graciously. For Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to conclude our service this evening by singing to God's place in Psalm 122.

Psalm 122, page 416. Psalm 122, we'll sing the whole psalm.

This psalm reminds us of the joy and the peace of the Christian life. The psalmist had joy going to God's house and he prayed for the peace within the Lord's house.

[34 : 23] So Psalm 122, I joyed when to the house of God go up, they said to me, Jerusalem within thy gates our feet shall standing be. The whole psalm go up, to God's place.

Amen. My joy went to the house of God go up, they said to me, Jerusalem within thy gates are Be Just dutching be.

Jerusalem özgaj guech sh■ Herren O heyee, the name of here are a fruit care for the people who are everyop of the people who are To the byot The tribes go up, the tribes of God fulfillers.

To Israel's testimony there, to God's name thanks to thee.

For thrones of judgment in the thrones of David's house there stay.

[36 : 15] May the Jerusalem may have peace and veracity.

Let them thine love be on thy peace of still prosperity.

Therefore I wish that peace may still within thy walls remain.

And ever may thy promises prosperity retain.

Now for my friends and brethren's sake, it be in thee I'll stay.

[37 : 39] And for the house of God our Lord, I'll seek thy good always.

Amen.