

## Joyful Realities Of Christ's Lordship

### Philippians 4:2-7

**Introduction:** This last week I flew back to my high school to speak to 6th to 12th grade young men over 3 days and a few things stuck out. **First**, Christian school chapels are all the same: some who care deeply, some who could care less, and others who are merely indifferent. **Second**, beacons of hope and truth are needed in our world since the next generation is bombarded with deception and worldly wisdom, confusing young people at best and leading to full on rebellion against God at worst. **Third**, the school was drastically different than when I was there 20+ years ago, not among the student body per se but among the parents who enrolled their student. Goals and intent were more along the lines of safety (compared to public school) and advantage (getting into a good college), where training in a Biblical worldview and development of character no longer the highest value. If there was ever a time that we need to live a distinctive Christian life before the world, now is that time.

We left off last week focusing on the future glory of heaven, our secure knowledge of the power of our resurrection with Jesus, receiving new bodies fit for an eternal kingdom. Heaven will be different than it is now in the eternal state, and will be more like earth than anything else. Then Paul transitioned with **pastoral care** that the church at Philippi would **stand firm**, not wavering and walking in stability. This marks a shift that we will feel for the rest of the book. Here is what will transition:

- **Realities of salvation laid out in example and clarity will lead to commands** - We've looked at examples of Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, as well as a comparison between the false teachers in the church to the truth of the gospel in chapter 3, where salvation is all about the work of Jesus, not us. This **positional reality** will lead to **imperatives of obedience**. Who we are will always lead to what we do.
- **Principles of Doctrine lead to Specific Applications** - Practice always flows out of doctrine, meaning how we think is so important, especially our thoughts about God. Just like the book of Ephesians where Paul spends 3 chapters laying out how we think about reality, he then laid out 3 chapters of how to live that truth out. In the next few weeks we will talk about conflict resolution, anxiety, right thinking, and contentment, with each of these being tied with all the truth we've studied in Philippians so far.
- **The Lordship of Jesus changes everything** - One of the main themes of Philippians is the fact that Jesus is Lord. Often when this is emphasized in our life, some have taken it negatively, thinking that Jesus is some cruel task master demanding perfection or else, somehow negating grace and love. This is simply a skewed view of the Biblical reality. Jesus' Lordship came out of His sacrifice as a servant, His effective death on the cross and the fact that God highly exalted Him. His Lordship is what secures our future body and kingdom. Now we see that each of applications this morning are directly tied to His Lordship.

We remember that we stand firm, stable, in order to **proclaim the Word and gospel of Christ Jesus the Lord**, allowing this to **play out in relationships together** and **processing it all in the nitty gritty of life**. All of this is a faith to be lived out in this world, so that we shine like lights in the midst of, not removed from, a crooked and perverse generation. That means that as things continue to change around us, no longer like it "used to be", we look not to run toward comfort and seeking safety, but view ourselves as instruments God uses in places like this. We must continue to challenge our thinking about our life in this world, not looking to find it here but lose it, not looking to preserve our life but lose it to keep it (see Matt. 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24, 17:33; John 12:25).

**Unity in Conflict: Think the same *in the Lord* (2-3)**

*I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to **agree in the Lord**. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored 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.*

Unity is essential but difficult. Love is needed for the world to know we are disciples of Christ, but sacrificial love is elusive. There is no greater witness to our world of the goodness of Jesus and the transforming power of the gospel than when the church lives in peace and unity, exercising relentless, supernaturally driven love with each other. The world should see it and long for it, since there is no other place where genuine love can flourish outside of God's love. The **problem with the church is this: it is full of sinners like me**. There is no such thing as a perfect church, as there is no perfect marriage, family, boss, etc. In fact, in this imperfection we have all felt the implications. How many of us have been burned by a relationship, left a church not for doctrinal differences but because of personal conflict. How many have ended marriages not because of lack of money or a place to live but because of interpersonal conflict. Whenever a group of people gather, the potential for conflict is high, even under the best of circumstances. Because we have all felt this, it is not all that surprising that Paul had to deal with specific conflict in Philippi. What we are given is **graciously vague**, so we have to deal with the reality of conflict rather than something narrow and situational.

**Source of Conflict**

Paul had dealt with relationships in general (2:1-4) but now he named names. The issue was serious since he **urged, pleaded, and begged** for resolution of divisive conflict. We are told who these two women are but not much else, except: 1) They were church members, not false teachers or those asserting pressure from outside the church. They were **clearly believers** since their names were written in the book of life (Luke 10:20; Rev. 21:27) 2) Their conflict was NOT over doctrine or teaching, but evidently it was interpersonal (as most conflict is) 3) The stakes were high since these were *leading ladies, influential* since they walked with Paul and others in gospel ministry, possibly from the origination of the church. So Euodia and Syntyche were believers, faithful in gospel ministry, members of the church, and close friends of Paul and the leaders of the church, yet they had the type of conflict that could affect the rest of the church, leading to divisions, factions and splits. We are reminded that most church splits are NOT over false doctrine (a "good" reason to split) but because of **unresolved conflict**. **Where does this conflict come from?** This is an important question, since once we know where conflict comes from, we know how to deal with it.

- **Desires at war IN us** (James 4:1-3) - "*What causes **quarrels** and what causes **fight**s among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you **fight and quarrel**. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions"* This can be summed up as **people are the perceived roadblock to my happiness**, and when I do not get my way or am not happy, I lash out at them since they are in the way.
- **Pride and selfishness** - When we think that we are right, or think others as less valuable than ourselves, conflict will remain. Pride creates agendas and selfishness elevates what I want and get out of the relationship. Pride does not admit wrong, and selfishness shifts blame. As long as these two rule, conflict will continue and relationships will end.
- **Wrong thinking** - By nature of the fact that Paul called these two the "think the same", wrong thinking plagues conflict. We think the other person needs to change, not us. We think that the

greater sin lies outside of us, not in us. We focus on what went wrong in the process, how something was communicated, and how we were treated rather than loving the other person. We forget to realize that we need grace, have been forgiven, so we can give grace and forgive others as God in Christ forgave us.

### Solutions to Conflict

If these are the sources, what are the antidotes? This passage and the rest of Philippians give us the answers.

- **Change of thinking** - Paul urged these precious leading ladies to "think the same" or have the continual attitude of agreement in the Lord. This was a present command that meant they needed to **continually think the same way**. But it was the object of their thinking that was key, **IN THE LORD**. If we remember that Jesus is Lord, not us, if we remember that we have been redeemed by Him, have His righteousness, have been called to serve like Him, it is impossible to continue to pursue a course of conflict.
- **Help of others** - Paul asked a "true companion", which was either some general people in the church or a man named "Suzegos" to come alongside the women and help them. Isolation in the Christian life is dangerous, since we begin to believe our own lies. Who we surround ourselves with, and who helps us work through conflict is key, since we do not want to multiply ignorance. The church needed to help at this point to bring about a resolution between these two since they could not do it themselves.
- **Humility** - "*Consider others as having surpassing value greater than yourselves*" When we humble ourselves truly, conflict can be resolved. So often it is our **feelings that get hurt in conflict**, and we collect personal wounds from others that do not easily fade. Sometimes its hard to identify a specific sin or even incident, but often its a cumulative affect that leads to separation. When humility rules, we are willing to absorb wounds by love, since love covers a multitude of sin.

### Joyful Living: Rejoice *in the Lord* (4)

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice*

Paul comes back to a theme of the letter with a simple yet profound command to **joy**. He repeats this command, and gives it in the present active tense, meaning we are to continue to rejoice no matter the circumstance or situation. Remember that joy is *not a feeling, but a deep seated confidence that God is completely in control of everything, and He desires our good and His glory, so we can trust Him no matter what happens and in whatever is out of our control.*

Is this hyperbole by Paul? Does this mean what we think it means?

First, rejoicing is a **commitment**, an ability we have in the Lord to do regardless of circumstance, personality, or upbringing. For a believer and follower of Jesus, **to rejoice is a choice** we make. It recognizes that life is hard in this world where we face *loss, sorrow, pain, misery, and death*. So this is not some artificial, plastic smile type of fake happiness but a free choice we have because of the reality that Jesus is Lord.

Second, rejoicing is **counter-cultural**, meaning it is the opposite response from those around who have no hope in Christ, and thus makes the gospel look glorious. Life is hard, and if in this life alone we had hope, the only reasonable alternative would be *fear, complaining, and depression*. "Eat, drink, and be

merry for tomorrow we die" would be the rallying cry if we could not rejoice in the midst of circumstance (1 Cor. 15:32).

Third, our ability to rejoice has everything to do with our **expectations in this life**. If we think that life is supposed to be easy, comfortable, just, or controllable, it will be impossible to rejoice. In the first phase of the book of Acts, Peter and the Apostles were brought before the High Priest and council and ordered to stop preaching in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:28). However the apostles were compelled to obey God, not men, and were *unfairly, dishonorably, and unjustly beaten and told to stop it*. Their response was fascinating. *"Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."* (Acts 5:41). Not only did they suffer physically but in an honor-shame culture, they faced the greater pain, which was a loss of honor with authority. Yet, this was a reason to rejoice, not shy away.

Are you able to choose to rejoice today? What circumstances have made that seem impossible? What needs to change in your thinking to move from a lack of joy to a choice of rejoicing?

### Gracious Responses: *The Lord is Near* (5)

*Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand*

#### Showing Grace toward others

An extension of joy results in how we treat others, especially those that are difficult, who treat us badly or even desire to do us harm. In the church of Philippi, they not only dealt with conflict from within, but false teachers and suffering outside (Phil. 1:28). Reasonableness, or gentleness, is a tough word to capture in English, but a good attempt is: *A humble, patient, steadfastness which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace and maltreatment, without hatred and malice, trusting God in spite of it all*. How we respond to those who treat us poorly makes all the difference in our belief that God is good and glorious and that we actually want other people to taste of it.

None of us like being treated poorly when we do what is right. We want to fight for our rights, for fair treatment, for justice. But Peter dealt with this in terms of servants and masters in 1 Peter:

*For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps." (3:19-21)*

#### Established hearts

What is our reality in all of this, both in suffering with graciousness and anxiety to follow? The Lord is near. This is true in two foundational ways. He is near **spatially**, meaning He is with us by the Spirit. *"The nearness of God is my good."* (Psalm 73:28; 34:18, 75:1). He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5 cf. Josh 1:5). He has given the Holy Spirit Who will assure us and guide us. This means that whatever we are going through, it is NOT because God does not care nor does it mean He has checked out, but is walking with us through it.

Secondly, we know He is near in His return, as we talked about last week. We know that there is an end to the pain and suffering, disappointment and sorrow we face in this world. We know that everyone will one day face perfect justice, that no one gets away with anything, and God will bring vindication. He not only walks us through, but reminds us that He will return and make it all right. That is why James said, **"You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."** (5:8). We can

respond patiently with others, even when they treat us wrong, knowing that there is an end to what we have to endure.

### **Anxiety Fighting Prayer: Minds guarded in Christ Jesus (6-7)**

*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 mind in Christ Jesus.*

### **Antidote for Anxiety**

Finally, Paul dealt with the issue that plagued the church then and the church now. He gave an all inclusive command in the negative sense, "**Do not be anxious for or about anything.**" Yikes. That not only is all-encompassing, but is a command to follow with no wiggle room. The Bible never gives commands in a vacuum but deals with the true realities of life. Anxiety is a real response, and has very little to do with external circumstances in this sense. In this time of writing, the church was anxious about Paul's future and about their own suffering, where we do not have those extremes, yet our response in anxiety is the same. So where does **anxiety come from?**

- **Lack of Control** - We all want to be in control, whether that is our circumstances, people in our life, or to know the future. We want to be able to control outcomes, like physical well-being, our kids success, or a job. Anxiety comes when we **demand to know the future, have answers now that God has not promised to give us.** When we do not get the answers we demand, or do not receive them in the time we want them, anxiety kicks in.
- **Lack of Assurance of the Future** - This is a corollary of the first, but when we do not find rest and comfort of our future with Christ, we dread the day to come. The loss of assurance causes us to cling to the present, clutching for something tangible rather than believing by faith.
- **Fear** - We are called to fear God, but there is another kind of fear. Fear of failure, loss, pain, or physical suffering can cause us to react negatively in the present. Some have gone through something traumatic which causes us to shrink back and be fearful of situations, people, or the unknown. Fear is real. It is most oft commanded reaction to avoid in Scripture, to FEAR NOT (see Psalm 58:3-4 - "*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you, In God, whose Word I praise, in God I trust; I shall **not be afraid.** What can flesh do to me?*")
- **Lack of understanding of purpose or intention** - When there is a lack of clarity on what God is doing, if He is good, we react in self-trust rather than dependency on Him.

The core of all of these: anxiety is a conflict of our faith and trust in God, and faith in hard. That is why we are to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12). Anxiety clearly has **physical consequences and symptoms**, as well as **physical symptoms can enhance our worry.** That is why we must recognize that all of the above causes are NOT DIRECTLY PHYSICAL, so the solutions ultimately are not physical, but can be helped physically. In other words, exercise, sleep, diet and medication can help us with physical symptoms and can even help us think clearly to get to the core, but no amount of physical treatment can cure anxiety.

### **Supernatural Peace**

Notice that the cure for anxiety that Paul offers is not a change of circumstance, venue, or a desire to be taken out of suffering. It is to bear up under the pressure with the resources God gives us graciously and bountifully.

- **Prayer** - *If we are going to fight against anxiety in anything we must pray about everything.* We can so easily undersell the necessity of prayer, not because we have exhausted a pursuit of God but because we do not believe it will be effective. In this prayer, we make **requests**, communicating our need to God who already knows but still wants us to talk to Him. Most of us have someone who we know is safe and wise to talk to (parent, friend, spouse). God delights when we let our needs known to Him. But we also make these known with **thanksgiving**. This is so important in our prayer. Our prayers can far too often read like a doctor's clipboard or my kids Christmas wish list: "I want this and this, and fix this and this physical thing." We treat God like a genie, rubbing the lamp and expecting God to fix it all the way we want it. **Thanksgiving** keeps us from focusing on ourselves in prayer and to move our perspective on who God is and what He is accomplishing. Prayer does not ensure our circumstances will change, and it is not a magic fix, but there is no moving away from anxiety without it.
- **Peace** - What we really need to help us through worry and anxiety? Something supernatural. The peace that God brings through Jesus Christ surpasses understanding (science cannot explain it) and is strong enough to **guard** our minds and hearts. The word guard is a military grade term, a soldier that will not let the enemy through. The source of our worry is NOT outside of us but inside, and so we need something that will guard our **minds and hearts**, the control center where anxiety, fear, and worry is produced. Prayer is the conduit to this peace, and God is the giver with Jesus being the supplier. Notice that nothing here speaks of a changing of how we feel, or if pain goes away, or that we are told what will happen tomorrow. But we will have **peace, since fear fights against our joy today**. This is the same type of prayer Paul prayed for the Ephesian church to understand the **love of Jesus**:

*"...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and **to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge**, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Eph. 3:17-19*

- **Proper View of Reality** - Next week we will look at how we think changes everything. We have to have a proper view of life, God, our lives in this fallen world, and our future.

So we **stand firm** in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We let the truth of the goodness of God and the work of Jesus Christ permeate our thinking so that we can respond differently than those without joy, hope, and peace, in order that we can offer something far better to them. This world is shifting always, and it sure feels like its getting worse. But we do not waver or run, but stand firm, stable **in the Lord Jesus Christ**.