

Philippians 4:2-9

Philippians 4 *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! ² I plead with Euodia and with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

There is a problem of increased anger and anxiety in the world. There is a growth of hate-crimes, name-calling, trolling and general anger on social media. We are not however to be like the world, because we are called to be citizens of heaven. Nevertheless it is very difficult not to be infected by the attitudes of the world around us. This was clearly a problem with the church in Philippi viz *Euodia and Syntyche*... fellow-workers of Paul, probably therefore leading people in the church, who had fallen out. . So how do we stand firm? How do we avoid becoming angry and anxious people. How do we learn to live like the citizens of heaven we are called to be, living in peace? For peace is the remedy both for anger and anxiety because living in peace means living in harmony, not anger, with one another; and living in peace also means not being anxious about our circumstances or the future. However, that is much easier said than done, especially when so many around us do not live in peace.

The big question then is how we discover this peace of God. In this passage, Paul gives us some very helpful direction. Firstly, with regard to living at peace in the church:

Remember who your fellow Christians are. 2 helpful ways of thinking:

- 1. Fellow-workers** working for the cause of the gospel. How can we proclaim the good news of God's love for us and Christ's saving power if we are at odds with each other? But our fellow Christians are much more than that: they are
- 2. Beloved brothers and sisters** This is the term Paul uses both at the beginning and end of this passage vv.1 & 8 *my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown*. Paul's terms of endearment not because they were all wonderfully lovable people, but because they are beloved of Christ.

...for all eternity - *whose names are in the book of life*

This brings us back to the idea that we are fellow citizens of heaven – called to live together for eternity in the presence of Christ. *Imagine living with that person in the same household as Jesus* for in his eyes that is exactly what you are doing. After all, *the Lord is near*. So says Paul, be gentle. Don't be like the world with all its over-reacting, people cutting themselves off from those they disagree with, the increasingly violent name-calling even amongst those holding public office and the anger and trolling we find in social media. Don't be like that, says Paul, be gentle with everyone – for each person is precious to Christ and what's more, he is right there! So if in doubt, ask yourself: *What would Jesus do?*

How would he react or respond to this person?

Remember God's love for you – What does this mean in practice?

- 1. Rejoice!** How did feel when I announced the chorus *Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice* ?

Did you think great – I feel really happy today – I'm up for rejoicing. Or did you think (*sarcastic*) *Oh great – the last thing I feel like today is rejoicing. Why do we have to be so blooming happy all the time.* It's true that some of us are *Tiggers* and some of us are *Eeyores* and yet Paul gives us this repeated command to *Rejoice* ! But it's not just *rejoice*, it is *rejoice in the Lord*. Focus on Jesus, his amazing love for you, all that he has done for you, and all the blessings you have through him.

Often there will be particular blessings we can thank God for but whatever our circumstances, however challenging, sad, even tragic, *the Lord is near*, and the Lord's grace, love and saving power is always there, always the same and that's why even when we are struggling with our lives, we can always rejoice in Him. In fact that is when it is particularly important that we do. *viz: the importance of worshipping together...*

It's not always easy - we need constantly to be reminded, which is no doubt why Paul writes: - *I will say it again: rejoice*. In fact this word *Rejoice* comes 8 times in this short letter to the Philippians – and *joy* another 5 times.

And 2 verses later he says whatever your situation, bring it to God but do it with thanksgiving.

2. **Ask** If rejoicing means focussing on the positive, Paul doesn't expect us to ignore the negative. Of course we will often have burdens, worries, anxieties and concerns – about health, or family, or money or work or our future. God doesn't expect us to ignore these worries or pretend they don't exist, much less feel guilty for having them. What He does say is *I am near – right by you so hand all your concerns over to me, your loving heavenly Father. I don't want you to be anxious about anything, but in every situation, bring your requests to me*. Nothing is too big for God to deal with and nothing is too small for him to be bothered with – He is our loving Father.

3. **Rest** – rejoicing and asking is God's remedy for anxiety. For He says if you do rejoice and hand over everything to him, His peace will **guard** your heart and mind – *guard = garrison* *This is not the peace of an English country garden this is the peace that comes from having a phalanx of bodyguards protecting you wherever you go. Even if crowds of worries or difficult demands and challenges press in on you, even though there is a barrage of negative thoughts that can come in like missiles from all around you – both from other people and the evil one. (The fiery darts of the devil) you are surrounded and completely protected by God's peace.* And Paul says it is beyond understanding. Just this last week, one of our home group was recalling how her newborn baby had been gravely ill, but once she had handed the situation over to God, she felt completely at peace.

There is another way in which this peace is beyond understanding because it is not just about us feeling at peace – this peace is dynamic, active. It is God's *shalom* – it is a healing peace that strengthens us and enables us to become the person God wants us to be in that situation.

Remember who you are – your roots and your destiny.

The way we think and what we focus our mind on is very important:.

“Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.”

Sadly, the world around us seeks to fill our mind with lots of negative, destructive, unhelpful thoughts: social media, newspapers, radio, TV – it's all around us. Sir Thomas More said: *Occupy your minds with good thoughts or the enemy will fill them with bad ones. Unoccupied they cannot be.*”

If you are, as Paul says, a **citizen** of heaven, then your thoughts need to focus on the **things** of heaven. Heaven is not some ethereal realm beyond the stars. Heaven is where God lives, where Christ dwells and the Lord is near – just around the corner, just beyond our sight. The Kingdom of heaven is the realm where Jesus is King – unchallenged – it is the place where *everything is true, everything is noble, everything is right, everything is pure, everything is lovely, everything is admirable – everything is excellent or praiseworthy*. Who do those terms remind you of – surely they are a description of Jesus and surely his kingdom will reflect his character. That is what you are a citizen of – that is your *home*. It is where you have come from and where you will one day live forever. Paul says never forget that.

The best way of training our minds to focus on the things of the kingdom is to read God's word every day – especially the New Testament but also the Old (particularly the Psalms and the Prophets). This is how we mould our minds to think the way God thinks.

Another way is to emulate saintly Christians. Paul says to the Philippians: *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice*. They had the example of this most amazing, godly, devoted apostle. In our present day, there may be wonderful godly Christians in our lives that we can emulate. We can also read about the lives of great Christians from the days of the early church right up to our own era. None of them were perfect, Paul knew that about himself – but we can still learn so much from them. And Paul says don't just learn from others but make sure you put it into practice as well.

The old joke about the vicar is that *he was so heavenly minded, he was no earthly good*. But Paul says actually we *all* need to be more heavenly minded! – not in some vague other-worldly way, but focus your mind on the kingdom of heaven, on how things are done there. Be heavenly-minded like that and you will do a lot of earthly good. After all, Jesus taught us to pray: *Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*.

So how do we stand firm as a church in a hostile world? How do we avoid the anger and anxiety which is so prevalent in the world around us?

Remember who you are - a citizen of heaven

Rejoice in God's love for you and hand all your concerns over to Him

Remember who your fellow Christians are

Beloved brothers and sisters; beloved of Christ.

Do this says Paul and I promise you that not only the peace of God will be with you, but the God of peace will be with you himself.

And if God himself is with us, how can we fail?