

Philippians 4:2-23

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[0 : 00] If you'd open up at Philippians chapter 4, you'll recognize that prayer from chapter 1 in Philippians.

And we come today, as Ben said, to the last in our series in this lovely book. I feel just about ready to begin it. We've left so much treasure untouched.

And that's particularly true today as we try and cover chapter 4. Who was it that set this series?

There's too much to cover today. Chapter 4 is like the practical highlight of the book.

Because what the Apostle does is he holds two things together. He holds together a very pointy practical application. You'll see what I mean in a moment.

With the astonishing supernatural living reality of being part of the church. And the way the Apostle does that is he speaks about our spiritual location.

[1 : 05] Paul is in Rome, in prison, a thousand kilometers away from Philippi. But like all believers, he says, we are in Christ. And the Apostle applies what it means to be in Christ to our anxieties, to church disagreements, to finances, to experiencing the presence of God, to how we engage with the life of the city, to coveting and contentment.

So just fly over the chapter with your eyes for a moment. You see at the end of verse 2, I entreat you out here in Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Verse 4, rejoice in the Lord. Verse 7, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Verse 10, I rejoiced in the Lord.

Verse 19, my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Verse 21, in Christ Jesus. It's not just a throwaway line.

It's the usual way the New Testament has of describing the most profound change that can happen to any human being. When we take hold of Jesus Christ by faith, the Holy Spirit unites us to him in such a way that it changes our spiritual location.

[2 : 27] We move from being outside of Christ to being inside of Christ. And we're not just attached to Jesus by the power of our faith. We are brought into Jesus where he holds on to us.

And all the riches and all the blessings that God has for us are in Christ Jesus. And when you change location, everything changes, right? You know, you fly from Australia to Vancouver, everything changes.

When you're in the airplane in a different location, everything changes. And if you move from being outside of Christ to inside of Christ, everything most certainly changes. And there are two very practical results.

And these are the two headings. The first is the supernatural spiritual peace that comes in Christ and how it works. How it works in our community and how we treat each other.

And secondly, the supernatural spiritual partnership that God's given us in Christ. So they're my two headings. Number one, verses two to nine. The supernatural spiritual peace which passes all human understanding.

[3 : 38] Just look back at verse two. The apostle begins by naming two women publicly in the congregation, Euodia and Syntyche, who are not working for peace.

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Now think about this. Paul names them publicly and he knows this letter will be read aloud.

And more than that, in verse three, he enlists the help of others in the congregation to help resolve this conflict. This is all a bit strong, isn't it, for our Canadian politeness.

Paul, are you really allowed to do this? I was tempted to list some names, but I value my life too highly. I think when you settle down with this, it's a sign that the apostle believes these women are able to handle it.

And the congregation is. And I think it also shows this is not a minor quarrel between two difficult personalities. These women were in leadership.

[4 : 54] And the disagreement is affecting the unity and life of the congregation, opening the door to division. Clearly, it can't be a gospel issue.

Otherwise, the apostle would take sides. But here are two leading women not being of one mind. So the word he uses for agree isn't the usual word for agreeing.

Paul is not saying you have to have the same opinion on everything, thank goodness. It's the same word he used for mind back in chapter two. Being of one mind.

Being, having the same love, full accord of one mind. So Paul is not saying, oh, let's all just get along. He's saying the conflict of these two women are threatening to eclipse the gospel and the great unity we have in the gospel.

So Paul calls them both to one mind in the Lord. Because he says your spiritual location is in Christ Jesus.

[6 : 00] The same Lord who emptied himself and humbled himself and now reigns on high. And all their conflict and hurt feelings and sense of being in the right, Paul says, are nowhere near as important as the lordship of Jesus Christ.

And they need to come back to Christ together and ask him together what Christ would have them do. And the conflict is already involving others in the congregation.

And Paul reminds them that the one key thing that their disunity is damaging is their ability to strive side by side for the faith of the gospel. That's how unresolved conflict works in a congregation.

It sidelines us from the work that Christ has for us. Unresolved conflicts in the church harm those who are involved.

It harms the whole church and it harms our witness. Because this is how it works. The first thing we do when we're in conflict, we try and gather people on our side.

[7 : 07] And when that doesn't work, we begin to withdraw. And our attitude shifts. We think about ourselves and how right we are and how wrong they are and how we might have been wronged in the process.

And we slowly become self-absorbed. And the more self-absorbed we become, the more deaf we become to the voice of God when he calls us in a particular direction. So it's important.

We step aside from striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. Because we don't like those people very much who are striving with us. And gradually my interest becomes more important than the interests of others and the interests of the gospel.

And you can tell because you move from being a lover and a co-worker to being a user and a consumer. And if the apostle is describing any one of us, I entreat you to come back and have one mind in the gospel.

I'm not saying agree on everything. Paul is talking about how we treat each other in our disagreements. Are we able to instill encourage the others and work with them with the gospel?

[8 : 20] Or are we withdrawing and nursing resentments, hoping everyone else will see how right we are? It's good stuff, isn't it? Someone said, resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

And it's interesting, Paul calls on both women to make the first move. He reminds them of their deeper unity in Christ. This is deeper than their opinions.

That their names are written in the book of life. That they have a supernatural identity and a supernatural future. That they are living as citizens of heaven in Philippi or Vancouver.

And that means there's something far more important in their lives than being right. It's Christ and his body. One commentator says, where Christians can't bear the sight of each other, they will not be able to look the world in the face.

So Paul calls us to the peace that comes from him. And I think that's why suddenly in verse 4 he says, rejoice in the Lord always.

[9 : 26] Again I say rejoice. Again, again, again. He said it repeatedly through this book. Why does Paul keep telling them to rejoice in the Lord?

It's not just because of the supernatural joy and sense of God's approval that comes in Christ Jesus generally. It's because in this context, in this lovely congregation, they are discouraged and disheartened and afraid.

Not so much because of the trauma of persecution on the outside, but because of the trauma of selfishness and division on the inside. So rejoice is not cheer up everybody, be happy. It's rejoice in the Lord. And how do we put this into practice? Well, Paul says we do it in two ways. Rejoice in the Lord we put into practice by how we speak to others and secondly how we speak to God.

So how do we speak to others? Well, verse 5, Paul says, let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

[10:37] Reasonableness is an incredibly rich word that needs a bit of explaining. It's a gentleness. It's a forbearing. It's being considerate of the person that you are speaking to, particularly when they're treating you badly.

It's being gracious and gentle when you're confronted by a difficult person. It's the opposite of quarreling and wanting to get your own way.

It's being concerned with their interests, the interests of others, specifically when you're being treated unjustly and unfairly. It's the fruit of humility, the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

And it's interesting, this word, I think reasonableness is not a very good translation. It was used of Jesus himself. It's required of Christian leaders and it's part of the wisdom from above in the book of James.

And it is the overflow of rejoicing in the Lord in how we speak to others and how we treat them. Again, it's not whether we agree with them or disagree with them, but it's how we do it, how we speak with them.

[11:45] That's why the apostle says the Lord is near. He's not talking about the second coming. He's talking spatially. His presence is so close because we are in Christ Jesus.

The presence of the one who emptied himself from heaven humbled himself to death for us. And if we're in Christ Jesus, by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, we depend on him actually in our conversations.

And the joy of the Lord ought to affect how we speak with each other. And secondly, it affects how we speak with God. Here we come to the verse we spoke with the children about.

Let me read it. This is so familiar and lovely, isn't it? Verse 6. It's a great verse.

And we rightly use it at the end of every communion service as a blessing. But I want to say something that I think probably 99% of us will not likely disagree with.

[12:54] And that's okay, just as long as you talk to me nicely afterwards. And that is the peace of God is not primarily here our emotional tranquility. It's not our warm feelings.

In the Greek, it's the peace which God himself possesses. I think which is better. That's why it's completely beyond human imagining. And in Jesus Christ, God shares that peace with us, his own peace, as we pray with him.

It's one of the reasons we pray, to get to know God better. And it's a specific and certain promise here that God's own peace will come to us and he'll share it with us.

And it will be like a military unit guarding our hearts and minds. It comes to us as we pray. So all our anxieties, they're better spoken to God than they are to others.

In prayer, we struggle to get to know him better. And he shares his peace with us as we ask with thanksgiving. There's one more thing the apostle wants to say about how peace works.

[14:01] And that's verses 8 and 9, if you just look down at it. And a lot of commentators fly over this list. In the list, whatever is pure and honourable. They're uncomfortable with this list because the virtues are not Christian virtues specifically.

They are Greek, pagan Philippi Greek virtues. You can find them in Plato and Virgil and Horus. So why does the apostle mention this list, whatever is true and honourable and just and pure and lovely and commendable and excellent?

Well, I think he's trying to equip the Philippians to live as citizens of heaven in Philippi. Why? Because when persecution threatens, there is an acute pressure on Christians to give in to the temptation to define ourselves in opposition to the culture around about us.

And again and again in Philippians, the apostle Paul has turned the congregation outwards. He says, think about what it means to live in this world. Live as lights in this world. Look. And not everything in our culture is good to be accepted.

Not everything in our culture is bad to be rejected. And Paul is encouraging the Philippians and he's encouraging us to be fully and thoughtfully engaged with the life of our city. Being a Christian

shouldn't cut us off from our neighbours and from those around us.

[15:25] It ought to make us better neighbours and friends to take opportunities to do good. And today in West Coast Canada, we have a different set of virtues in our culture.

Most of our virtues today are orphans. They were birthed out of the Christian faith and now some of these virtues continue but they've changed because there's no God involved with them.

And I think as Christians, we ought to be very thoughtful about how we respond and how we think and talk about equity and diversity and inclusion. We need to be able to affirm what we can and think through what it means for us as living as lights in the world.

And if we do these things, verse 9, the God of peace himself will be with us. So that's the end of the first half of the sermon. I feel like I should take some questions but I'm not going to.

We're going to move on to the second section. And that is we go from the supernatural spiritual peace to the supernatural spiritual partnership in verses 10 to 20.

[16:32] And as I said earlier, in some ways this is the high point of the book and it's all about money. And you can tell how important it is because when we had the gospel in chapter 2, we had five verses on the gospel.

And now here in chapter 4, the apostle gives 10 verses to money. Because whenever we talk about money, we're not really talking about money. The apostle speaks about contentment and partnership and worship.

And I think he's left it to the end of the letter so that our hearts might be full of the lovely Lord Jesus. The initial reason Paul wrote this letter from prison was because the Philippians sent a gift of money to him in Rome by Epaphroditus.

And you can see how sensitive the apostle is as he approaches this in verses 10 to 13. He wants to make sure they understand he's saying thank you and not deviously trying to raise more money.

So he tells them about the open secret of contentment. Look at verse 11, please. Not that I am speaking of being in need. Because I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

[17:52] Or the end of verse 12. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

So we are all creatures of desire. And the philosophies that call on us to extinguish our desires like Stoicism or Buddhism are inhuman.

And the key is redirecting our desires to the God who orders everything and who shares his strength with us in every circumstances because we're in Christ Jesus.

So coveting and greed are at the root of so much social evil. But this is wider. It can be a desire for things or it can be a desire for the great romance or to be thought of as clever or talented or successful or admired.

And whatever we covet quickly comes to control us because the Bible says coveting is idolatry. And it affects those around us in the church.

[18:57] Discontentment gives me a self-absorption. And I begin to see others as those who are going to be means to meet my needs. So Christian contentment, like the peace of God, has very little to do with our circumstances.

So when you're in abundance, there's a particular temptation. And when you're in need, there's another kind of temptation. And spiritual contentment is learned because it comes as the fruit of our relationship with God, who promises to strengthen us in Christ whether we have plenty or whether we lack.

And Paul reveals this secret of contentment before he deals with partnership. Because it's almost impossible to join in partnership with other believers while we remain discontented and self-absorbed.

And so we come to verses 14 to 20. And this is the most substantial dealing in the New Testament with giving money in support of gospel ministry.

You remember when we went through 2 Corinthians, the apostles spoke about raising money for the Christian poor in Israel. But here, specifically, it is about giving money for the support of Christian ministry.

[20:18] And the partnership words come in verse 14 and 15. It was kind of you to share, to partner with my trouble. You Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only.

Now, from the start of the letter, Paul has been talking about partnership. You remember back in chapter 1, verse 5? I thank my God because of the partnership in the gospel from the first day till now.

So financial giving to gospel ministry is part of genuine Christian partnership. All true Christians are partners in Christian ministry.

It's more than giving money, of course. But it's not less. Striving side by side for the faith of the gospel includes financially supporting the ministry of the gospel that you're receiving in the local church.

So a true Christian ought not see themselves just as an attender, that you probably should attend, nor just as a member so that you can vote at the meeting, but as a true Christian partner in gospel ministry, actively and sacrificially giving and thereby striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

[21 : 40] It's not like flying to Calgary where you pay your money and you let the staff and the pilot do their work. It's not like ordering something online, you pay your money and expect it to arrive.

Look at how he speaks about actively giving in the work of the gospel, joining in the partnership of the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 17. He says, not that I seek the gift, I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

So in giving money to the work of ministry, there's this conversion and transformation that happens, not just in us, but God takes our gifts and creates fruit in heaven.

And perhaps even more astonishingly, when we give sacrificially to the work of the gospel as an act of worship, it pleases God.

At the end of verse 18, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. God does not need our money, but he loves it when we give from our hearts.

[22 : 45] When we give to him, we're not earning his approval, but he, like a loving father, receiving a gift from a child, enjoys our giving. I think this is great.

I mean, COVID, okay, COVID has made us all a little bit more selfish, hasn't it? And the Holy Spirit invites us into the worship of giving, not so the church can meet its budget, nor just to break the power of covetousness of our own hearts, but so that we might take part, participate in the work of God in a profoundly important and practical way, bearing fruit for eternity, pleasing God now.

And it's not about the amount. It's not about who gives most. You know, the student who prays and thinks and gives a little bit bears the same heavenly fruit as the person who prays and thinks and gives much more.

It's worship. It's partnership. It's the practice of contentment. And all of this, all these different threads in Philippians, Paul brings together in verses 19 and 20.

I'll finish with this. Paul ties together the source of our joy, our hope, our love and the spirit, our salvation, our contentment. Verse 19. There it is.

[24 : 23] Paul goes right back again to the reality that God delights in giving. And not just giving, but the words here mean filling, filling, overflowing. He doesn't just cover the basics.

He lavishes on us out of his limitless resources, the riches that are his. He turns the cracks in the dry ground of our lives into springs of water to receive his floods.

He turns our needs into cups by which we dip into the ocean. He turns our needs into doors by which God himself can come through. And the channel by which God supplies our needs is Christ Jesus.

So do we want to stand firm in faith? Go to Christ and ask him for help. Do we want to learn more contentment? Ask Christ for his strength.

Do you want to strive side by side for the faith of the gospel? Let's go to Christ and ask him for more of the spirit. Do we want to grow in humility and in witness and in hope?

[25 : 30] Let's go to God in prayer. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.