

Partners in Difficulty

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[0 : 00] Good evening to you all. I could break out and sing to you if you wanted up here, but maybe not.

Okay, Steve has actually mentioned that we're on to the second last week of looking at Philippians. It's our commitment series and we are seriously wanting to be the church that God wants us to be. In every aspect of Christian living, we have been asking the Lord to transform us for his glory. We also want this church to be a beacon.

We want it to shine Jesus. We want it to shine so that those who do not know Jesus will be drawn to Jesus. And last week, as we were reminded, we were encouraged to press on to the goal of salvation.

And with the genuine love that Paul shows here to the Philippians, he uses words of endearment as he shares with them.

[1 : 15] He gives this final appeal that we've just read. And looking at the passage, we see the reality of what church can look like sometimes.

In this passage, we see there's individuals fighting over issues. We see that there's individuals getting anxious and individuals filling their hearts and minds with some rubbish.

And all of a sudden, we can be found wanting as the church. And yet, I think that we can take heart because right in the middle of these verses, in verse 5, we see the Lord is near.

And yet, with all that is said by Paul, he reminds us the Lord is near and we are not alone. There is a future because the Lord is near.

There is a hope of change because the Lord is near. And last week, we saw that there is a prize. The prize is heavenward because the Lord is near.

[2 : 27] And so, with confidence, we can look at this passage because the Lord is near. Because he can change us and transform us into the people of God that he's calling us to be.

Now, I've broken this into three sections on peace. Peace with one another. Peace within ourselves. And peace with God. Peace with one another.

Peace with one another.

We always get along with each other, don't we? You know, 10 o'clock and 5.30 service chuckled at that. The 8.30 people just didn't chuckle.

But the thing is, of course, that is wrong. That is wrong, isn't it? Because we do agree at times.

Even though we're all Christians and we're all wanting to serve the Lord, there are times that we disagree.

[4 : 23] Now, there's a wide diversity of thought that should not surprise us when you have a lot of different people in a church. There's great diversity. There's great diversity. And people have opinions on almost everything.

But the question is, what do we do with the diversity that we have in churches? Do you allow it to cripple you?

Do you say, we're so diverse, we'll never agree, so therefore we won't do anything? Or do you move forward prayerfully, realising that sometimes some people won't ever agree with you?

What course do you actually take when that actually happens? Now, you mustn't misunderstand me. There are biblical truths that we will stand really, really firm for here at St. Paul's.

And that we won't entertain debate and let's agree to disagree sort of stuff. Those things are about the gospel.

[5 : 30] The gospel is the gospel. And there is no other. Jesus is Lord. And we need a saviour. Jesus died. He rose. He's in heaven.

He will return. And he will judge the earth. Judge the world. But not all disputes are actual gospel issues.

They don't have a gospel value to them. So let's look at the text and read what Paul says in Philippians verses 2 and 3. It says, I plead with you, Odea, and I plead with Syntyca, to agree with each other in the Lord.

Yes, and I ask you, loyal yoke fellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the course of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Here were two women, both of them, really committed Christians, who have worked side by side with the apostle Paul and who have had a disagreement and we don't even know what the disagreement is about.

[6 : 36] Now, this letter that we've been looking at in Philippians, it's a letter to the church in Philippi and in it Paul deals with some really tough issues.

So why on earth do you think, in the midst of such important issues, Paul sticks something so personal about two ladies who were having a fight in the congregation?

Now, shouldn't he have tried to maybe solve this little problem quietly and on the side? Shouldn't he have sort of not brought it to everybody's attention?

Because really, 2,000 years down the track, it's written and millions of people have read about these two women and they've been named about this argument that they've been having.

Well, maybe it's just because it's important that the church communicates to the world that we deal with conflict in a different way to what the world deals with it.

[7 : 48] We're able to find common ground and agree to work in harmony with one another. Notice what Paul does and what he doesn't do in this.

First of all, he doesn't take sides. He doesn't say, Sintica is right and Euodia is wrong. And secondly, he doesn't pull rank. He doesn't say, listen, I'm the Apostle Paul and therefore I say that if you two don't agree, then both of you are out.

He doesn't say that. Instead, he encourages them to find some common ground where they can agree. He says, I plead with you to agree with each other in the Lord.

Do you remember what Paul wrote in Romans 12, 18? There he says, if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, so there's some responsibility for the individual, live at peace with everyone.

And there's something else that Paul does. He appoints a third party to intervene and he's called loyal yoke fella. We don't know who he was.

[9 : 01] Some commentaries say that it might be Luke. But whoever he was, he was a peacemaker. And Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God.

Now, there's been a number of occasions over the 16 years that I have been at this church whereby I have mediated between a couple of people.

Not a lot, but there's been a few scenarios whereby I could actually sit and we listen to both sides of the story and we find a common ground and we move forward. But there's also been some times where I have been mediated against, mediated, whereby I have foolishly said something that has offended somebody and we have needed a third person to come in and talk something through.

Now, I can say sitting in a conversation where it's been mediated can be very embarrassing. It can be very humbling. It does cause one to have to confess a sin to others.

But I have to say they have been real growth moments for me. They've not happened often, but they have happened. And that is what is happening here. There's a growth opportunity that is happening.

[10 : 24] It's tough, but it's helpful and it's necessary for a church to move forward. Because if those issues are not dealt with, they can divide a church. And there is nothing more that Satan would love to do than to divide a church.

Because if he can do that, then he can so cripple the church that it won't be effective in getting the message of Jesus out to anybody. Because we're also focused about looking inward and at our own issues.

So it's important for each of us to pledge to each other and to God that we'll allow ourselves, that we will not allow ourselves to be pawns of Satan to divide his church.

As we serve God together, we need to choose to be at peace with one another and always be resolving any conflict that may arise, be it ever so little.

Secondly, Paul tells us about peace within. Listen to verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all.

[11 : 41] The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Now, I don't know how you felt when you came to church this evening.

But sometimes we feel on top of the world and we have no cares in the world whatsoever. And everything is going our way. But a good deal of the time, we don't actually feel that way at all.

Sometimes we come to church and we're feeling pretty down. Sometimes you can be carrying a heavy burden. Maybe you're worried about something.

Maybe there's a problem in your life that just doesn't seem to go away. Maybe you feel guilty about some sin that you have committed and you are working out the consequences of that.

[12 : 42] Maybe you're concerned about finances or your exams, as we heard before. Maybe you're frustrated because you're trying to get something accomplished that you just can't seem to get it done.

Whatever the reason, God has us all here tonight. And I think Paul's words are directed at each and every one of us who are carrying any burden whatsoever.

Picture a massive hurricane. A storm with cyclonic winds. Rain, thunder and lightning usually accompany the winds.

And hurricanes can be very fierce as storms with the relentless pounding winds that continue hour after hour after hour. But the fascinating thing about a hurricane is the eye of the hurricane.

And you may have seen movies of this, of which I have. But in the middle of the hurricane, where the eye is, there is perfect calm in the centre. And there's always those characters who are racing off to get into the eye of the hurricane.

[13 : 50] Madmen, but in any case. And once they're in the eye of the hurricane, there's still wind and turmoil and everything is happening around them. But there's peace and calm right in the middle.

Well, the same can be for us in the storms of our life if, in fact, Jesus is at the centre. You see, there can be calm and peace even in the darkest of life's storms.

It doesn't mean that life is always peaceful. It just means that we're centred on Jesus in amongst the storm that actually happens.

And we need to realise, as Steve was saying, we need to realise that Paul writes this letter. He's not sitting in some ivory tower writing this letter.

He, in fact, is in jail and he is waiting for trial and he, in fact, might be executed. But in these verses, Paul writes a formula for developing peace within.

[14 : 58] He says, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. In other words, don't worry and let God handle it.

Now, Paul encourages us to pray rather than thinking, getting anxious.

Now, we often think that we have to pray. I've often had people say, you know, sort of, I haven't prayed and, you know, I better pray. And it's sort of like a duty that we've got to do.

But in actual fact, prayer is a privilege that we get to do. And I'm sort of thinking that I need to change my attitude towards prayer.

That it's a privilege that we get to do, not a duty that we have to do. See, God's cure for worry is always the same. It's always going to be prayer.

[16 : 00] His way is always action. And that action is making everything known to him. God will not be surprised by what you pray.

He's not going to, when I sit down and pray and let God know all the things that are concerning me, he's not going to suddenly say, oh my goodness, Debbie Gould's in a mess.

I didn't know that was happening. He's not going to say that because he already knows absolutely everything that is going on in our lives. But God's desire is for us to hand it over to him.

It's an action of taking the privilege of prayer and handing it, all of our cares and concerns, over to the Lord of which he already knows what's distressing us.

And that we are not putting him at the centre of our life. Why do we pray? Well, we pray because the Lord is near, as the verse said. Because the Lord is near, we need not be anxious for anything.

[17 : 02] And because he's near, we have peace within. A deep, abiding peace that passes all understanding. Because the Lord is near, a wellspring of joy fills every part of our lives.

And because the Lord is near, our hearts and our minds are renewed and restored in Christ Jesus. And with that restoration, we become once again fresh, vibrant and alive.

Now let me just say, as an addition, that is not always easy. I was picked up just this afternoon in expressing something that concerned me.

And a person who was in this morning's service reminded me to listen to my own message. So it is not easy necessarily.

So we need each other to encourage each other. Pick each other up. When we start to see one of our brothers or sisters getting anxious and worried, we ask, are you praying?

[18 : 09] Are you submitting this to the Lord? That's why we have each other. We have each other to encourage each other. And that is what a friend of mine did this afternoon on the phone.

She said, Debbie, you are not even listening to you. It's only a few hours since you preached a message. Listen to your own message. And she was right.

When we come to church, we can mouth all the things that say, you know, crown him with many crowns and he's Lord of lords and King of kings.

But sometimes we can actually come to church. And I obviously did a similar thing today. We can come to church, put our burdens aside for the little hour that we're in here.

And when we leave this church and go home, we pick up all the burdens that we had put down and we put them back on our shoulders and continue worrying for the rest of the week.

[19 : 05] That is not what life is meant to be. We're meant to give them over to Jesus at the foot of the cross and pray for his sustaining in our everyday life.

In Ephesians 3.16, it says, Paul is saying that even while we're wasting away on the outside, if we're Christians, we're being strengthened and changed on the inside.

And in Matthew 6, you might like to go home and read Matthew 6 because Matthew 6 talks a lot about worry. The Bible actually talks a whole heap about worry and anxiety.

And that is because we basically fail at it quite frequently. Otherwise, scripture wouldn't need to actually be addressing it. But Matthew 6 is where you need to look up what Jesus says about worry also.

But worry is also assuming responsibility that God never, ever intended us to have. He will carry the burdens for us. We need to turn our worries over to him.

[20 : 19] It's a really simple little thing, and yet we are so slow to follow it through. 1 Peter 5.7 says, Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

And finally, Paul mentions peace with God. In verses 8 and 9, we need to read these verses often because this is what he says.

Finally, brothers, 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, 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.

Now, Paul is saying, here are eight filters. Everything you hear, everything you see needs to pass through these eight filters. And if it doesn't, make it through the eight filters, then it shouldn't be in your mind and certainly don't let it into your heart.

Now, there is so much garbage in the world, and the old saying that that is garbage in, garbage out is absolutely true. Whatever we take on board is what will come out at some stage.

[21 : 40] So we need to think about these things. We need to think about the movies that we watch. We need to think about the television programs that we watch.

We need to think about the music we listen to, our conversations, our attitudes, what passes over our computer, the bulk emails that get passed from computer to computer, those spam things that happen, and everyone thinks this is fantastic and funny, and there's, you know, a little sort of other message happening.

We need to think about all of those things. Do they pass through the eight filters? Because Paul says, put everything through these eight filters. If it's not true, then don't welcome it.

If it's not noble, if it's not right, or pure, or lovely, or admirable, or excellent, or praiseworthy, don't let it find a home in your heart.

And the verse says, if you use these filters, you'll have peace with God. There is a direct correlation between taking action and having peace with God.

[22 : 52] Praying and having peace with God. Putting everything we do through filters, we have peace with God. There's a responsibility on our behalf.

Jesus says, I've told you these things, though, that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.

Now, do you remember what Jesus said to his disciples when they were up in the upper room after Jesus' resurrection? The disciples are there. They're fearful for their own lives.

Their leader was dead. And their future is uncertain. And just then Jesus appears. He's come through the locked doors. And he speaks to them.

And what does he say? Well, Max Licato puts it this way. The betrayed sought the betrayers. And what did he say to them?

[23 : 51] Not, what a bunch of fools you are. Not, I told you so. And there was no, where were you when I needed you?

Sort of speech. No, his first words were just one simple phrase. Peace be with you. The very thing that they did not have was the very thing that Jesus offers.

He offers peace. And he still offers peace to each and every one of us today. And finally, Paul says in verse 9, whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put into practice.

And the God of peace will be with you. It's another action. And peace will be with you. What's he saying? He's saying take scripture seriously.

Learn from it and apply it, what you have learned. And in doing so, the God of peace will be with you. Do you have it?

[24 : 59] Did you come to church tonight with it? Or did you find yourself carrying burdens that were too heavy to carry? Are you going to leave here with the burdens still on your back?

Or are you going to turn them over to Jesus? You see, I know one who died on a cross for each and every one of us and for our sins.

I know one who shed his precious blood that we can have everlasting life. He is the one who is near today.

And he is the one called Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[26 : 03] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.