

# Guest Speaker Jeff Hodgson

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[ 0 : 00 ] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

The title of this message, and I think the main thing that God wants to impress upon us today, is that it matters that He is near to us.

It matters that He is near to us. Now, don't you find that it matters a great deal when someone you care about is nearby?

It makes a difference, doesn't it? When I get to take Melissa along with me on a trip that I fly, how I fly the airplane, and especially how I land the airplane, takes on a new joy when she's with me.

I always, of course, want to do right by my passengers and fellow crew members and everything. But when I have my beloved on board as well, I know she's paying attention, and she will rejoice at my successes in a way that no one else will.

[ 1 : 12 ] She is for me like no one else on board. And knowing that, and knowing that she is there with me, affects me.

Well, I believe that knowing that the Lord is at hand in these same ways affects us too. So my hope is that the Lord uses this message today as a little biblical counseling for those who could use it today, and for all of us as we serve one another in the future.

This life has its challenges, doesn't it? And there's no greater thing that we can do for one another in those challenges than to come alongside as friends in a community and point our friends' attention to the Lord who is near.

So, can I get you to turn to Philippians 4? And we're going to read and consider verses 1 through 7. Let me pray. Lord God, thank you for this moment. Thank you that you bring your people together for the purpose of blessing your people.

[ 2 : 33 ] Lord, we are bold to ask. Reveal your heart to us today. Bless your people. Give them grace. Build them up in their most holy faith.

Strengthen them, Lord. Lord, that we may leave from this place built up to glorify you with our redeemed lives.

Thank you for the word of God. Thank you that you have not hidden yourself from us, but you have revealed yourself to us. Reveal yourself to us again today, we boldly pray, in the name of our Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Amen. All right. Philippians 4, verses 1 through 7. Such a privilege to be able to continue in the series that you all are studying in this epistle of joy.

Starting with verse 1. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord my beloved.

[ 3 : 45 ] I entreat. I entreat Yodia 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.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. 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.

This is the word of the Lord. We are going to begin at verse 1, which serves both as a concluding statement from the preceding section, but I think also works as an introductory statement for what follows.

Paul tells the Philippians to stand firm in the Lord. And in so doing, he sets the stage for what is a sweet deal, explaining that there is a certain way to live that carries with it tremendous promise.

[ 5 : 23 ] So our first point then is what we should do in the Lord. What we should do in the Lord. And later we'll look at what will happen in the Lord.

So first things first. Point one. What we should do in the Lord. Well, let me start with a bit of a side note. But a side note that I think is actually very telling.

It's really nice to be appreciated, isn't it? God seems to like it when we appreciate one another.

Outdo one another in showing honor, says Romans 12.

Well, what would move one as tuned into the Lord as the blessed apostle Paul to refer to someone as brothers whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, my beloved.

I believe Paul sees something of God's grace upon them and with them. Now, these are not perfect people, right?

[ 6 : 34 ] He's just about to start asking a couple of them to stop squabbling with each other. And yet, this is what he has to say to them. Grace is amazing and beautiful.

So the little side note is that I would want you to remember that. Remember that heart of the Lord toward you the next time that you mess up.

Remember, God is not looking primarily at what has messed up. God is looking primarily at his grace upon you. Right. Okay.

Onward. God is very clear that he would like for our lives to be marked by things like peace and hope and joy.

And he is at work making that happen by freely and graciously offering grace to us that brings these things about.

[ 7 : 39 ] Peace and hope and joy aren't things that just happen on our own. They're not things that we can just conjure up ourselves. They are fruit that comes from something else that makes them possible.

And that something is God's grace. So what I believe God is essentially saying to us in this passage is, Do these things that are about to follow, for they are the ways by which you will lay hold of the grace that I have for you, the grace that I am offering you.

And he has grace for us to do these things. This is one reason why it is so very important that Paul says, In the Lord, so many times.

If you are in the Lord, you have power to tap into so that you may respond to God's call on your life. The Holy Spirit of God, the helper, resides within you. There is power available to you if you are in the Lord.

[ 8 : 53 ] Now we don't naturally think about the power behind things. We naturally think that things just come about merely by our efforts.

Without recognition of that power behind what those efforts are. So it isn't a natural thing for Paul to say in another place, It was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

But that rightly acknowledges the way things are. God gives grace. He gives the power.

He empowers us to do what he calls us to do. Even the things that he promises will bring about even more grace.

Grace upon grace. So what are some of these things that help us to lay hold of grace? Well, Paul sets some of those out for us in today's passage.

[ 9 : 58 ] And the first thing that he says is, Agree in the Lord. All right. Suppose in the midst of controversy between two people, Each of those people took time to acknowledge the following.

Jesus Christ is Lord. He's my Lord. And he's your Lord. And his gospel trumps everything else that we might think of.

Would that put the controversy in a new light? Would that provide perspective about the controversy that was at hand?

To say those things would mean that the most important thing is not that we are lockstep agreeing about all things.

What it says is, The most important thing is, We must start by agreeing with this one crucial thing. A beautiful thing in relationship between people is what unites them.

[ 11 : 14 ] But our tendency is to look to the wrong things That unite us. Take our two friends from verse 2. Yodea can root for Tennessee And Sunteke can root for Auburn.

Or whatever their disagreement is. The thing that Paul is pointing out is that their mistake is not that they should be rooting for the same team.

Their mistake is their forgetting what truly unites them. And that would make all the difference.

College basketball, Job or career, Hobbies, Even children.

None of these is a permanent and solid foundation that we should trust to sustain a relationship.

None of them can be the solid foundation that is Christ.

And that solid foundation allows for, even encourages differences between us in all kinds of other things.

[12:27] So lay hold of the grace that God offers you by agreeing together in the Lord. Next, Paul says, Rejoice in the Lord.

Now what grows our love for something? Have you ever joined a club or something because you were interested in some hobby perhaps and found that your appreciation for that thing actually grew as you enjoyed it with others.

I used to like to fly radio control airplanes with my son before his life got too busy for such things I thought that was just an absolute blast.

Building the planes flying the planes crashing the planes rebuilding the planes the more we did the more I liked it and the more that we were bonded together.

It's really good to be able to enjoy things together but what would be the greatest thing to enjoy together?

[13:42] And would enjoying Him together make a difference? When life comes along and kind of punches us in the nose or seeks to crush us with the weight of what we face where are we going to turn?

Radio control airplane flying? At times life is filled with wonderful pleasantness but suffering inevitably comes what if our rejoicing in the Lord grew our love for Him what if it made us more aware of Him would it make a difference to us when life proves to be fickle and fragile and downright hard does rejoicing in Him strengthen us?

Paul says lay hold of grace by rejoicing in the Lord together next be reasonable so what makes all things make sense?

And we submit ourselves to authorities all the time don't we? In doing so makes things work what if you gathered a group of people together to play some sort of a game would it go better if everyone used the same rule book are we playing American football or European football it makes a difference to know what game you're playing and what the rules are well what if we helped one another in what the Lord says are His rules for us and then we lived our lives accordingly would that be grace to us to help us to see that life makes more sense when we understand it through what He says to us the faith is not an anti

intellectual magical mystical kind of thing it's reasonable God has spoken to us He's given us His own heart in His revealed word He wants us to have a faith that is reasonable He wants us to understand how He wants it to go for us what our lives should look like there certainly are times of mystery in this life when we don't have all the information yet to fully understand things love but God doesn't call us to live life totally uninformed He has revealed enough of himself and his ways that life in fact makes sense and we can trust him with how he says that we should live.

[17:14] Lay hold of grace, Paul says, by reasoning together in the Lord. Submit yourself to him and his guidance and his authority.

Explore that together and grace will come. But try as we might to follow the rules.

Troubles do abound, don't they? And we are tempted to be anxious. Well, God offers something better to us when he calls us not to be anxious.

So Paul says, do not be anxious. My grandmother was a world-class worrier.

Whenever any of her family was driving to come and visit, she would spend the whole time standing at her front window, staring out the window, kind of nervously, you know, scratching the back of her hand each time, just worrying out the window.

[18:22] Now, we receive that as a sign of her love for us. Well, yes, but there was something that was missing from that.

Wouldn't it have meant so much more to know that she cared so very deeply about us that she was explicitly and openly entrusting us into the hands of a heavenly father she trusted?

One who is all-wise, one who is all-powerful, one who is all-loving. What could she have taught us by that explicit faith?

There are kind of three classic ways of facing perceived trouble in a self-reliant way. There's anger, there's escapism, and there's worry.

Well, what if we helped one another to be God-reliant instead of self-reliant? What if we encouraged one another in ways that sought to see how God could be trusted in the face of danger?

[ 19 : 44 ] The devil tries to single us out from the flock, but God calls us together to fight for His grace. And I think we lay hold of grace when we resist anxiety together and help one another to trust in Him.

And then lastly, Paul lists this. Our Heavenly Father loves to interact with us.

And so He says, pray. God is sovereign and in control of all things, yet He has told us that He wants us to pray.

He has said that He will give grace and bring things about through our prayers. The sovereign God who does whatever He pleases in control of all things, and yet He tells us to pray.

He wants to interact with us, and He will use those prayers to bring about His good purpose.

[ 21 : 00 ] Prayer acts almost like a valve for grace. It's as if God has promised, I will water these lands.

They are not going to be arid and dry. They will be watered. And there is ample water pressure in the pipelines upstream, and He calls us to open the valve.

He's going to get this done. He's going to get these waters, these lands watered. But He invites us to come in and turn the valve for that.

And grace flows. Has He not promised that when two or three are gathered in His name, there He will be also, attending to our prayers?

So lay hold of grace by praying together. So these are the things that I think Paul lays out for us and says, these are the things that I want you to do in the Lord.

[ 22 : 14 ] Because I think that there's a tremendous promise coming. And what is the result of all these things? I'm going to turn back to verse 7.

And recall that again. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Do this. Do this. Do this. Do this. And when grace comes through that, we find ourselves experiencing peace.

A peace that the world doesn't understand. A peace that surrounds us and protects us and defends us against all that the world, the flesh, and the devil would throw our way.

So Paul points us, there is peace available to you. God's grace will come and you will experience peace.

[ 23 : 35 ] Do you find it interesting how many times that Jesus is quoted speaking of peace? It seems like one of his favorite ways to greet.

And yet it goes way beyond a mere customary greeting with him. I think there certainly were many people in his day greeting one another by saying peace.

peace. But I think it goes beyond that with him. And it certainly isn't like our how you doing?

Even though we really aren't actually hoping for a life update when we say that. No, peace seems to be a profound category for the Lord.

Check out some of these striking verses. This is Luke 12, 51. Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.

[ 24 : 43 ] This is John 14, 27. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid. In John 16, 33. I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace.

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart. I have overcome the world. Peace is something that Jesus uniquely promised to his followers.

And he wants us to understand that his peace is counterintuitive. It isn't like what we might expect.

It is otherworldly. Our understanding of peace may be something like a state of no conflict or a life without turmoil or trouble.

[ 25 : 55 ] But that isn't what Jesus said he's bringing. Instead, he says he's bringing division or a sword in Matthew's version of these verses.

Jesus' presence draws a sharp distinction. It opens up a gaping chasm between the world's ways and God's ways.

He didn't just show up so that things would just become nice. He showed up and said I am going to make absolutely clear that there's a difference between what the world is like and what God is like. And it's going to cause turmoil and trouble. But for you but for you there's peace.

So what would it look like to face the difficulties of this life if we encouraged one another in our unity in the Lord?

[ 27 : 05 ] In our understanding of his promise for peace. That we together have been called uniquely to be recipients of his grace that will result in peace.

So even though Jesus has come to remove any doubt about the enmity between the world and the Lord kind of making us foot soldiers in the war against the world's ways he would have our hearts not be troubled not be afraid.

And how can that be? Because his peace isn't like the world's peace which is a false peace. The world's peace comes through compromised ethics And deals!

And coercion! And payoffs! And monitoring for compliance! But Jesus gives his peace differently. He gives his peace freely based on his own merit and character and empowered by his very own spirit.

[ 28 : 22 ] He tells us that we can trust him and that he has won the victory that we will enjoy forever however long we must wait for it now.

Jesus is very clear in this world you will have tribulation but the ultimate victory is his and he has definitively won it and what Paul tells us is that that ultimate peace is something that we can get a taste of now in this life right now in this life our hearts and minds can be guarded in Christ Jesus. Grace is available to us to stand in the face of the world's enmity and troubles the devil's schemes and our own flesh's weaknesses and failures and to do so with peace.

The world mocks the things of God and laughs at our simple notions of morality. The world is fallen and broken and difficult things face us because of that but our hearts and minds are guarded against these when we remember that our king is alive and he cares and he has the final say and his word to us is peace.

The devil hates God and schemes to discourage and defeat God's children but our hearts and minds are guarded as we resist the devil in the name of Jesus and we see him flee before him.

[ 30 : 30 ] We know that God will keep us and sustain us and his word to us is peace. Our flesh is weak and we grieve at the times that we sin and we fail to love God and our neighbor.

But our hearts and our minds are guarded as we rest in the gospel of Jesus who nailed every one of our sins to the cross and has promised to make all things right.

He is both the Alpha the one ruling at the beginning of all things and he is the Omega the one ruling at the end of all things.

And his perfection is ours and our imperfection he has taken upon himself onto the cross and has thrown our sins as far away as the east is from the west.

And he says that his word to us peace is peace. So what would it look like to face the difficulties of this life if we encourage one another in our unity in the Lord?

[ 32 : 00 ] If we gathered together to rejoice in who he is and what he has done on our behalf? If we sought together the mind of the Lord on how he would have us live?

if we encouraged one another in the fight against anxiety and to rely on God? And if we prayed together? What would it look like if all those things that Paul called us to in the first six verses were something that we practiced?

Would those things help us to have peace as we care for our aging parents? as we try to love our family members who are far from the Lord?

As we seek to manage our busy lives and all their commitments? As we face financial struggles?

As we bear the burden of parenting?

What would it look like? Is it reasonable for us to believe that that peace can be for us? Well, there are two things that persuade me that it's not only reasonable, it is essential for us to understand that it is.

[ 33 : 24 ] There are things that Paul doesn't discuss at length or even explicitly say, but I think their implication is tremendously important for us.

First, it would be good to revisit again what it means to be in the Lord. I mentioned earlier its importance that it means that we have grace, power available to us to respond to God and His call on our lives.

These things we've been considering, we can't simply offer them as helpful strategies for living to just anyone who's encountering a hard time.

It would be presumptuous and naive to speak of these things to people who don't have ears to hear them. The way that these things are possible is by the grace of God that comes to those who know Him as Lord and Savior.

There is grace for the Christian. There is grace for those who are in the Lord. So with that in mind, when I do biblical counseling back in Knoxville, my efforts always start with the gospel.

[ 34 : 41 ] If the person I'm seeking to serve isn't a believer, my faith to help them comes from his or her knowing the Lord and having His grace available.

And if the person I am seeking to serve is a believer, what better way to start than by recalling the identity and the promise the gospel secures for God's beloved children?

Or as Jesus explained in John 15, He's the vine and we are the branches. And the branches attached to that vine have a whole different outlook than branches which are not.

The outlook branches attached to that vine is life abundant. So on top of that, being in the Lord means that these things Paul calls us to aren't legalistic strategies to earn God's favor.

Favor. To be reconciled to God by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus on your behalf means you already have God's favor.

[ 36 : 07 ] Legalism says do these things so you can get in good with God. Do these things so God will like you. Brothers and sisters, being in the Lord says you are already in good with God.

You don't have to do anything to earn his smiling approval. He delights over you because of what Jesus has done.

You are his beloved child. So rather than trying to earn God's approval, these things that Paul lays out simply are saying, here's where you will find the grace that your Savior has won for you.

And it is the Father's pleasure to give it to you. So that's the first thing that persuades me that this peace is available to us because we are in the Lord.

The second thing that I think is incredibly important is to note whom this letter is written to. It's not Paul's letter to Judea.

[ 37 : 32 ] It's not Paul's letter to Suntiki or any other individual. It's Paul's letter to the Philippians, to a church.

And inherent in these exhortations to agree and rejoice and be reasonable and fight anxiety and pray is the idea that these things are to happen in a community.

Paul could have written these things to an individual and it would have been great counsel.

Absolutely nothing wrong with, hey, be agreeable, be joyful and reasonable.

Don't worry, but pray that God, because God is with you. Those things are all true. But I don't think it was coincidence that this counsel was given to a church because the church is that unique place where God meets with us in a particular and powerful way.

When we come together, it is a foretaste of what we will experience for eternity. God will be present with us and His grace will be ours perfectly.

[ 38 : 57 ] We will agree in Him perfectly together. We will rejoice in Him perfectly together. We will be perfectly reasonable.

There will be no more confusion or question. There will be no more anxiety. Our communion and communication with Him will be unhindered and perfect.

And we'll do all of this together. And so God is giving us a glimpse of that glorious inheritance that awaits.

and it's ours to have now by His grace as we pursue it together. And so what does that yield in our lives?

It yields a peace that transcends the world's understanding. But is this to be a secret thing that we enjoy behind closed doors only on Sunday mornings?

[ 40 : 02 ] Far from taking us out of the world into Christian ghettos, it sends us boldly into the world to face its trials and tribulations, its dangers, toils, and snares, and to do so in a particular kind of way.

We will be strengthened by God's grace as we practice laying hold of His grace together. We will be affected by the glimpses of what is ours to come.

Agreeing, rejoicing, reasoning, fighting anxiety, praying. These aren't just coping techniques for a hassle-free life.

They are the ways that God builds us up. to proclaim Him to the world. We speak of the majesty of God with lives of peace in the midst of the world's fallen upheaval.

So, may God give us grace as a community of believers to build each other up in faith and may He use us to glorify His name.

[ 41 : 33 ] We have faith for this, for we believe it matters that He is near to us. Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, you are faithful, you are kind, you are merciful, you have called us out of the dominion of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of your beloved Son.

We once walked in darkness, but you have shown us the light of your mercy and your love. Thank you that you sent your son to live the perfect life that we cannot live and to suffer the perfect death that takes away our sins. Thank you that your son rose from the dead and proved to us that death does not have the final say. Thank you that we have a glorious inheritance that awaits and you let us have glimpses of that glorious inheritance today.

What mercy, Lord God. Thank you for meeting with us. Pray that you would pour out your grace upon us. Send your Holy Spirit. Build our faith, Lord God, that we may lay hold of the grace that you promise and that we would experience your peace. For your glory, Lord God, we pray in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.

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Thank you.