

# A Gospel Rejoicing

## Philippians 4:2-9

Preached at 8.15 and C@10 on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2015

### Intro

A couple of weeks ago we looked at the section before this and Nathan spoke about pressing on towards the goal.

Whatever goal you might have – if you think it's worthwhile getting there – you'll keep your eyes on it.

You won't keep looking back at what you've left behind.

But a coach doesn't just say keep your eye on the goal and go for it, does he? He'll have some plays to teach about how to get there.

And that's what we get in these few verses from the Bible we're looking at today.

In v1 where it says 'that is how you should stand firm in the Lord' is referring both to the words before and the words after – as in 'in this way, stand firm in the Lord'.

In 1:27 it says "whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

The whole idea of living in a manner worthy of the gospel is that the gospel is a way of life that's better for us.

And so keeping your eyes on the goal means keeping your eyes on that new way of living – the way modelled by Jesus and by people who follow his example... the new way that will be the way Jesus' followers will one day live... the way that makes a difference to our lives now.

But we're ordinary human beings who struggle to live like that.

We divide over disagreements. We get discouraged when things don't work out the way we'd hoped.

We get angry and hurt each other. We worry about what's going to happen. And in all this, we take our cues for how to act from what everyone else does.

In these verses we get some practical advice about how to persevere in standing firm in this better way – that way Jesus has shown us.

### **Agree in the Lord 4:2-3**

And the first thing is agreeing in the Lord. When we think back to chapter 2 remember it said “be like-minded”. It's the same words here... “be like minded in the Lord.”

The situation here is two women in the congregation at Philippi who need to be told to agree with each other in the Lord.

We don't know what the disagreement was about, but it sounds like they were deeply divided over whatever it was – so much so that Paul asks somebody senior in the congregation to help them come to an agreement.

Whatever happens, conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27). What does that look like here?

In v8-9 it says to fill your mind with whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy.

Can you fit division, anger or hatred anywhere in amongst that list?

Yet that's usually our starting point when we have a disagreement with someone. We start with what divides us – with what we disagree over.

But there is enormous common ground for these two women. Paul says that they both contended or fought at his side for the cause of the gospel.

Both these women had the cause of the gospel at heart in whatever it was they were disagreeing over. Just like Paul, their ambition was to see that the good news of Jesus was preached. We are never going to agree over every detail. In the life of any church, people are going to have different views and opinions about what we do and how we do it. Some things are more important than others.

Paul isn't suggesting we'll never have differences of opinion. But he still says "agree in the Lord." Reach an agreement.

Not just because it would be nice – but because you are 'in the Lord'. You have common ground with the person you are disagreeing with. That is, you are both members of Christ's body – both people that Christ died to rescue – both people who Christ has welcomed into his undivided eternal kingdom – both people whose Lord is Jesus.

There is our common ground. It's the gospel. And it's enormous common ground.

But because of our sinfulness, we don't want to start with our common ground. We want to start with the things we disagree about – how wrong the other person is, how he or she treated me.

And so the disagreement festers into name-calling, imputing motives to the other person, and even hatred.

Then before we know it, a disagreement between two people who both labour for the cause of the gospel ends up undermining the gospel by destroying the unity that Christ's death has paid for.

And it can all come simply from an unwillingness on either or both sides to want to put the work into sorting out the problem in a manner worthy of the gospel...

– whether that’s because we don’t want to find that we might have more in common with the other person than we would like, or simply because we can’t face confronting a difficult issue.

Maybe we don’t want to ask a mature Christian in the congregation to help us reach agreement.

Arguments that cause disunity that are not sorted out in a godly way are opportunities for Satan to get a foothold in the door of the church. Divide and conquer is his strategy. And it’s very effective at undermining the progress of the gospel that we long to see.

Paul says “agree in the Lord.”

Talk to the people you disagree with. Have someone help you if you need to. Start with the gospel.

Do we agree that Christ died for all imperfect sinners to reconcile us to God and to each other? Do we agree that Christ is Lord over all of us? Do we agree on the authority of God’s word that says to us here “agree with each other in the Lord.”? Do we agree about the glorious eternal future that all believers have and will share together?

If you can agree on all these things – all this common ground – then give thanks and rejoice together, and then talk about what you disagree about as people in the Lord who have so much more in common than what we differ over.

Stand firm in the Lord by agreeing with each other in the Lord.

## Rejoice in the Lord 4:4

Secondly in verse 4, Paul says to stand firm by “rejoicing in the Lord.” Again, this isn’t the first time Paul’s talked about rejoicing in this letter. In chapter 1 he said he rejoices, even though he’s in jail, because Christ is being preached.

In chapter 2 he says he rejoices because of the obedience of the Philippians to Christ. In chapter 3 he tells the Philippians to rejoice as they follow his example.

Here in verse 4 he says “rejoice in the Lord always.” Not “sometimes”, or “when you feel like rejoicing” or “rejoice when things are going well for you.” Rejoice in the Lord always.

As Christians, we can be joyful in every situation.

We mustn’t confuse being joyful with just being happy. So when we read this verse we think it means we should always be happy – that we should have a painted-on smile that hides sadness, or disappointment, or pain, or grief. That’s not what Paul means.

The circumstances we find ourselves in through life will sometimes make us happy, sometimes sad, disappointed. We’ll suffer pain and we’ll grieve. Paul’s not saying “stiff upper lip... cheer yourself up... nothing’s as bad as it seems.” Often our circumstances are every bit as bad as they seem. They will cause us tears and pain.

But true joy is so much more than pretending to be happy when we’re not... because the source of our joy is so much greater than our circumstances. The source of our joy is the completed work of Christ on the cross and the sure hope we have in him.

We have an eternal hope that our circumstances cannot rob us of. So even in the face of our own death, we can rejoice – because not even death can rob us of the reason for our joy – the eternal future we have with Christ because of his death for us.

So if we can rejoice even in the face of death, how much more should we rejoice in the midst of the other circumstances that trouble us in this life? – like when we're wronged by someone, or injured or offended. Our first instinct is to be bitter. Paul says "rejoice!" You can't do both. We have a choice. And Paul says "choose to rejoice."

Stand firm in the Lord by rejoicing in the Lord.

### **Be known for gentleness 4:5**

Thirdly, Paul says stand firm by being known for your gentleness.

There are lots of things that we want to be known for in life – our personality, good looks, our intelligence, influence or power...

Let your gentleness be evident to all.

Basically it's saying 'be known for not wanting to be known for any of the things that impress others.'

Gentleness is the opposite of self-seeking, self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, etc.

It's the better way of life. It's the way modelled by Jesus – who didn't even see equality with God something to be grasped, but willingly made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant... why? For his own self-promotion?

No, for the good of others – us – the people who wronged him.

It's not about me – about my rights, about my satisfaction, about my recognition.

The reason we're given for this is that 'the Lord is near'.

Whether that means that Jesus – the one who gave up all his rights for us – is present with us through his Spirit always, or if it means that he's returning soon, would you want him to find you promoting yourself in your own eyes or in the eyes of others?

Stand firm, being known for your gentleness – the Lord is near.

### **Why pray when you can worry 4:6-7**

There's an old saying: "why pray when you can worry." We live in a time in the world's history where there's so much to worry about... terrorism, drugs, gangs, racism ... In our own homes, we worry about our own safety, about how our kids will turn out, the economy, job security...

In verses 6-7 Paul says

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

If you stop at the word 'anything', it might sound like Paul's just saying 'don't worry, everything will be okay.' That's cold comfort to someone who's in the middle of a crisis in their life. They might have every reason in the world to be worried.

But that's not where Paul stops. He says that there's an alternative to worrying. It's prayer. Prayer is the way to stand firm in the Lord in every worrying situation. That's because prayer refocusses us on who is in control.

Worry rightly reminds us that we are not in control of everything we would like to think we are. Prayer reminds us that God is in control.

So Paul is saying to us 'act on what you believe'. God is sovereign. Because of Jesus' death our eternal future isn't in doubt. So we can trust him with the present. And we can bring everything that makes us anxious to him in prayer.

And Paul says 'go a step further... present your requests to God with thanksgiving'. In other words, remind yourself as you pray just how much you have to be thankful for because of God's kindness to us in Jesus.

At the end of the day, in God's wisdom, the things that worry us might not change. As we exercise our faith in Christ through prayer, we are reassured of the goodness of God towards us, even through the hardships of life.

And that – as Paul says here – will give us real peace that's greater than our ability to understand. It's peace that will keep us trusting in the gospel that is the ultimate answer to all our worries.

The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything. People who pray in this way stand firm in the Lord.

## **Conclusion**

In this way, stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

Agree with each other in the Lord.

Rejoice together in the Lord.

Be known for your gentleness.

Stand firm in prayer.

Stand firm in the gospel.

Stand firm in living the better life that we will live forever when we reach the goal that we're fixing our eyes on.