

Philippians 4:1-10

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[0 : 00] Well, have you ever heard it said that some people are too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use?! Have you ever heard that old saying, too heavenly minded to be of earthly use?! There's actually a kind of more modern version of that now, where so many people think religion is a terrible thing.

There are some people who will write that actually to believe in a heaven, to have thoughts of an afterlife, makes you a dangerous person in this life. That to be heavenly minded is not just of no earthly use, but to be too heavenly minded is to be of earthly danger.

Yet the Apostle Paul, as he reaches the end of this letter, wants to say exactly the opposite. He wants the Philippians, like himself, to be heavenly minded.

If you look back, just above the verses we read, back in just a couple of verses above, the end of chapter 3, verse 20, he's reminded them that our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself.

Therefore, chapter 4, verse 1, stand firm thus in the Lord. Keep on with that hope that you have. Keep on being heavenly minded, because it makes all the difference to the messiness of life now.

[1 : 22] Life often feels far removed from being a citizen in heaven, doesn't it? With our anxieties, the things that weigh us down. With the potential for tension with other people, with our ambitions and personal desires getting in the way.

We can often feel so far from heaven with the looking at despairing world around us. And yet the Apostle Paul wants us to stand firm in the hope we have, despite personal ambition, despite personal anxieties, and despite the potential for despair.

Let's have a look at those things briefly. First of all, how we need to stand firm in the light of ambition and personal tensions. You see those ambitions and tensions there in chapter 4, verse 2. I entreat Yodhia and Syntyche, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. See, personal ambition can get in the way of standing firm, can't it?

I want you to imagine the shock when this letter was read out. Because when this was first read, the church in Philippi were all being gathered in a room, and maybe people were starting to drift off at this point, because it's towards the end.

[2 : 34] And then suddenly, the reader would have said, I entreat Yodhia, I entreat Syntyche, agree in the Lord. Now at least, I imagine Yodhia and Syntyche sitting in that room would have gone, what? What's that?

Do you remember those days sitting at school, maybe it was just me, drifting off in the classroom, and suddenly the teacher calls your name? This is very rare that Paul calls people by name like this in rebuking them in a letter.

Can you imagine the shock? Can you imagine how hard it would be for them to hear it? Why does Paul do this? Why does he shock them like this? It's because they've lost their first joy, and instead of fighting amongst themselves.

You can see that as you look on in verse 3. You can see what these ladies used to be doing. They are both ladies, by the way. I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have laboured side by side with me in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers.

They were working for Jesus at one point. At one point they were on Team Jesus, and they were team players. It's clear in the language there. They laboured side by side with me, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers.

[3 : 47] They were on Team Jesus, doing Jesus work. But they've lost that joy, that focus. And now it seems they're more focused on themselves. We don't know exactly what the problem was.

It doesn't stop commentators writing pages and pages about it, but we don't know. All we know is what it says here. But there's a clue if you look back to chapter 2. Just look across the page.

Because Paul says almost exactly the same thing, back in chapter 2.

Look at verse 2. He says, Complete my joy by being of the same mind. Just as he's actually, in chapter 4 verse 2, he says, Agree in the Lord.

Literally, have the same mind in the Lord. It's the same idea, same words almost. And what mind do they have? What does it mean to agree in the Lord? Well, for the first part, chapter 2 verse 3, it means do nothing from rivalry or conceit.

But in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. See, these ladies, whatever the particular thing was that they were pursuing, they started to put themselves first.

[4 : 51] They started to look at their own agenda. And we can often do that, can't we? We want to see our ideas accepted, our view on things being the one that's followed. These two ladies are obviously important people in the church, in Philippi.

Maybe they were just getting too, too fixated on their own views, on their own ambitions, on their own desires for the way they wanted things to be. They're no longer on team Jesus so much as on team Iodia and team Syntyche.

Paul's saying no. Agree in the Lord. Have the same mind that you have in the Lord Jesus.

Remember what he was like. Chapter 2, verse 5. Or chapter 2, verse 6.

Have the same mind which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Paul is saying remember, remember Jesus.

Like you used to, you're a fellow labourer with me.

Remember what you've got in Jesus. Look at the end of chapter 4, verse 3. All those people who work together whose names are in the book of life.

[5 : 55] Where do you want to see your name? Says Paul. In the church news sheet? This is Iodia's idea. This is Syntyche's idea. This is Stuart's idea. Do you want to see your name in highlights in the newspaper?

Do you want to see your name being praised in someone else's blog or Facebook post? No. The great place to see your name is in the book of life. In the book of those who are citizens in heaven through the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what Paul's calling them back to. In the face of personal ambition we need to agree in the Lord. We need to remember what we have in the Lord. Our names are written in the book of life.

That is the most important thing. That's the most valuable thing. Not my reputation but what I have in Jesus. And of course everyone needs help with that, don't they? That's why verse 3 is so important.

What does Paul say there? I ask you, true companion help these women who laboured side by side with me in the gospel together. See any one of us at any point in our lives can get so fixated on our own ambitions and our own reputations that we need other people to help us to refocus on the Lord Jesus and all the riches we have in him.

[7 : 06] I wonder today which one are you? Are you someone who can offer help to others to refocus them on the true prize on the riches of Jesus? Or are you someone who needs help to stop seeking your own ambition and instead rest in the Lord Jesus and all he is and what he has done?

Well that's standing firm in the face of personal ambition. We need to remember all we have in Christ. Our name is a written book of life. There's not just ambition that can get in the way of standing firm there's also anxiety isn't there?

There's so many things we can be anxious about. I just had an email yesterday from a very good friend who has a very demanding job travelling a lot but his wife is dealing with very severe postnatal depression.

It's a cause of anxiety for him isn't it? I know people are anxious about their houses anxious about their jobs. There are lots of real pressures on us. And so was for the Philippians they had lots of real things to be anxious about.

If you look back to chapter 1 verse 28 for a moment they faced persecution. Paul says 1.28 Do not be frightened in anything by your opponents. They could be anxious by the way people were responding to them.

[8 : 16] They could be anxious because Paul was in prison. In chapter 3 or chapter 2 we learnt that they were anxious when they heard Epaphroditus was seriously ill. They had real anxieties about to deal with.

What does Paul say to them? Get over it? Look on the bright side? No, he says something very different. Look at verse 4 of chapter 4. Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I will say rejoice. And actually this is a big theme of the letter, isn't it? He said exactly the same thing back in chapter 3 verse 1. And all through the book Paul is rejoicing delighting in Christ. Now what's he telling them to do? Just block out the bad stuff and concentrate on Jesus? Well not quite. Look, this is a command. Rejoice in the Lord.

Now how do you rejoice in something? Let me tell you a silly illustration. My brother-in-law Alistair is currently rejoicing. Work is terribly hard but he's rejoicing.

[9:19] Why is he rejoicing? Because Southampton Football Club are second in the premiership. Now it probably means nothing to you or to me. It means a lot to him as a boy from Hampshire.

He loves Southampton. He has been a lifelong follower of Southampton Football Club. He has real delight in the fact that they thumped Hull 8-0 the other week. It was Hull. Whoever it was they were playing.

It was Sunderland. Sorry. It wasn't England. That brings him joy. Why? Because he's invested in them. Because he's loyal to them. Because he loves them. Now Paul is saying rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's not just saying work up your emotions. He's saying replace your happiness. Look at what really matters. Find that in Jesus. So we all rejoice in something, don't we?

Some people rejoice in their success. But then when the success is gone, what happens? Some people rejoice in relationships or in family life going well.

[10:20] But then when things turn bad, when a relationship breaks down, when the kids go off the rails, what happens? Joy is gone. Some people rejoice in comfort, don't they?

In having a nice holiday, going to a beautiful place, having time off and leisure. And yet then the money runs out or work kicks in, the pleasure bit's gone.

Paul says rejoice in the one thing that no one can take away. Southampton will not be second in the premiership table for much longer, probably. Come back in May and if I'm wrong you'll know I'm not a prophet.

But anyway. The point is rejoice in something that no one can take away, something real, something solid. Rejoice in what Jesus has done, the one who came and died to make us friends with God.

Rejoice in who he is, the one who cares for us now. Rejoice in the one who is coming back to remake all things. So we rejoice in what's important to us. We rejoice in where we find our identity, where our treasure is.

[11:22] Paul says rejoice in the Lord. In the midst of the anxieties of life, the fluctuations and the messiness of it. We rejoice in the Lord. And if we're rejoicing in the Lord then there are two natural things that flow out from that.

One horizontal and one vertical. You see that as you look at the verses. The horizontal implication is in verse 5. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone for the Lord is at hand.

Reasonableness is the way we treat other people. It's directed towards others. It's a characteristic of the Lord Jesus. It's translated as meekness and gentleness in 2 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 1. It's the attitude of charitableness towards others. Of overlooking mistakes. Why do we do that if we're rejoicing in Jesus? We do that because if we're rejoicing in Jesus we're rejoicing in the one who has taken the blame for all our mistakes and all our failures.

So we show that grace to others that Jesus has shown to us. And that's how Paul says let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The idea is that the rest of the world in Philippi would look in at this church and say well we think what they believe is nonsense but they're nice folk.

[12:41] They're very reasonable. They're very forgiving and accepting. I wonder if that's true of our churches. I wonder if it's true of the Christian groups in our workplaces.

Are we known for our reasonableness? for showing the kindness and charity towards others that Jesus has shown to us? If we rejoice in the Lord we'll be reasonable to others.

That's the horizontal outworking but there's a vertical outworking as well. Look at verse 6. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

See if we're rejoicing in Jesus we will be praying people. Do you notice the emphasis is on prayer here. Paul uses three different words for prayer. Prayer, supplication, making your requests known

to God.

That's what prayer is. Saying to God these are my needs these are the things I have. That's the we'll pray through rejoicing in Jesus we'll pray.

[13 : 46] Do you notice we'll pray with thanksgiving. Why is that? How does this help us not to be anxious? Is Paul just adding another list of things to do? Keep praying be thankful when you're praying No, not at all.

Prayer is about depending on God. If we're rejoicing in Jesus then we're naturally depending on God aren't we? We rejoice in Jesus because we know we can't be right with God ourselves. And so an outworking of that is we will pray. We get anxious when we think we have to be in control of things. About this time last year one of our gutters had collapsed.

Water was flooding everywhere. And to fix it meant going up on a ladder meant lots of things. For a start it meant going up on a ladder and readjusting it screwing bits in a wall and attaching a new drain pipe to the broken gutter.

Let me tell you I hate practical things because I've got two left hands and all thumbs and I hate heights. So I was getting pretty anxious about this gutter problem.

[14 : 49] And two doors down our neighbour who's a surveyor said I'll come and ditch you I'll help you out with it. And so dear Paul bless him he climbed up the ladder while I was holding it at the bottom actually doing no use myself but so he did all the hard work he sorted out all the bits I needed he fixed it all up.

I was no longer in control he sorted it out was I anxious? No. Because he was sorting it out. See the way to be anxious about nothing as someone said is to pray about everything.

To realise that God is in control not us. As soon as we know we're not in control that God is that helps us to pray helps us to not be anxious.

Do you know as Paul says we pray with thankfulness in everything with the verse there to not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God.

What things are you thankful for? Are you ever thankful when your company pays your wages? Well you might be but you probably don't rush to the HR department and say thank you for paying me.

[15 : 59] Why not? Because you've earned it that you're right. If someone gives you a nice Christmas present are you thankful? Or your boss gives you a bonus are you thankful?

Yes. Why? Because you haven't earned it. And so it is everything we have as we depend on God we realise everything we have comes from him. So we end up being thankful. It's easy not to be thankful isn't it?

It's a kind of very British thing not everyone here is British I know but I am so let me tell you a cultural flaw of mine. We tend to be quite miserable don't we? But actually when we sit back and think we have so much to be thankful for.

If you don't believe me make a little note when you get back to your home or your office or sitting on the train tonight or wherever it is write down some of the things to be thankful for it quickly grows doesn't it? So when we're thankful we remember we're dependent on this great God and that deals with the anxiety as well.

In the face of ambition personal ambition leading to tensions and troubles we need to rejoice again in Christ of who he is. In the face of anxiety and things weighing us down we need to rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 10] Remember all we have in him. So our reasonableness is evident to others and so our prayers go up to our God who is in control. And thirdly there's always a temptation to despair that can stop us standing firm.

And I think that's what Paul's getting at in verses 8 and 9. We can look out in the world around us and see things that are bad see things that are hard. We can look out at other people and see their flaws and failings and how they're making life difficult for us.

But Paul says don't do that. Don't do that. Instead what are we to do? Verse 8 Finally brothers whatever is true whatever is honourable whatever is just whatever is pure whatever is lovely whatever is commendable if there is any excellence if there is anything worthy of praise think about these things.

Is this the power of positive thinking? No, not really. Rather Paul is focusing us on all the excellent things things. Because ultimately everything that's good and true comes from God our Heavenly Father.

And all that is excellent and true is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. But Paul is mainly describing here moral attributes that would have been accepted in the culture of the day. The sort of things the Stoic philosophers wrote were good.

[18 : 23] Paul is saying they are good. These are good things we can see in the world around us. No matter how bad the culture gets there is still good there. Human beings made in God's image are never as bad as we could be.

By God's common grace there is still some goodness some moral decency. So Paul is saying don't despair focus on these positive things. When he says the word translated think about these things at the end it doesn't just mean okay, I've thought about them I'll go on the rest of the day now. The idea is continually bring them to mind continually focus on them. It's a word often translated reckoning or counting it's a sort of mathematical word if you like think about these things keep considering them.

That helps us to guard against despair because we are choosing to focus on what is still good in the world it helps us to guard against despair about other people as well. Back in chapter 1 if you turn there briefly Paul was in prison he was having a hard time and chapter 1 verse 15 he says some people preach Christ from envy and rivalry why do they do that?

Verse 17 the former proclaim Christ out of rivalry not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment in other words these guys they want what's bad for me but what's Paul focusing on?

[19 : 45] Verse 18 what then? Only that in every way whether in pretense or in truth Christ is proclaimed and in this I rejoice he's focusing on what is good what is excellent and praiseworthy that the gospel message is going out that's what he's choosing to focus on we too can choose to focus on what is good and a bit like a sprinter in a race you know sprinters focus on the finishing line don't let anything else distract them as they focus on the finish line that's their target that's what they aim for so as we start to focus on the beautiful and good and praiseworthy things so that starts to become our target we start to be formed like that and those are the attributes we start to develop but it's more than just focusing on things Christian life isn't just about thinking the right things or believing the right things or that's certainly where it starts it's also about doing the right things so look at the end of verse 9 what does Paul also say don't just focus on excellent attributes but follow excellent examples look at verse 9 what you've learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things and the God of peace will be with you what did they learn from Paul they'd learn the truth about Jesus what have they seen in him an example of someone who amidst suffering was still rejoicing in all the great things he has in Jesus Christ what have they learned from him everything here in this letter and what's the result as they focus on the excellent things which reflect Christ's glory as they follow the excellent example of Paul what will happen the God of peace will be with you the God of peace will be with you life is messy isn't it our ambitions our desires can cause tensions there are lots of things to be anxious about in the world around us life can be messy the world can look pretty despairing what does Paul say focus on Jesus rejoice in the Lord always then the God of peace will be with you back in verse 7 the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Philippi was a Roman garrison in Philippi those soldiers were there to guard the town to keep it peaceful and so it is as we pray as we focus on the Lord Jesus as we delight in him God's peace a peace which transcends all understanding a peace that we cannot get through human planning will guard our hearts and minds in the midst of a messy life as we focus on Christ and all we have in him so the God of peace is with us guarding us let's pray that be true of us