

Philippians 4

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 February 2023

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Do turn your Bibles to Philippians chapter 4. Philippians chapter 4. We found this letter just really appropriate and relevant. I found that at our life as a church.

! Rejoice.

Philippians is known as the epistle of joy. Fifteen times the word rejoice or joy appears. John Bunyan, the man who wrote Pilgrim's Progress, said, Joy is the flag that flies from the citadel of the Christian's heart.

To show that the king is in residence there. So you drive past Windsor on the M4 and you see Windsor Castle. And what do you look for?

What do you look for? It's the flag up, isn't it? Is the king in residence there? Is the royal flag flying? Because the royal flag, the Union Jack, is the sign that the king is in residence.

[1 : 17] John Bunyan says, the sign that Jesus lives amongst his people, the sign that Jesus is in a church is joy.

And it's not a superficial joy. It's not a kind of shallow, superficial jollity. It's not the kind of joy that you can just work up and put on on a Sunday morning.

But it's a deep-seated joy. It's a joy that's independent of our circumstances. That joy is the sign that the Lord is in the house.

And so people coming in amongst us, like they did to the church in Corinth, in 1 Corinthians 14, they will say, God is surely amongst these people. Joy is the flag that flies to show that the king is in residence here.

Now verse 1 is like one of those revolving doors. You know you go to the hospital and there's a revolving door? Or you go into one of those department stores? You enter in chapter 3 and it swings around and there you are in a different shop in verse 1.

[2 : 26] It's a little bit like that. Verse 3 is pointing us back, isn't it? Therefore, and you go into verse 1 of chapter 4 and it swings around and he says, Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm in the Lord.

Stand firm. So what's chapter 4 going to be about? Chapter 4 is going to be about how do you stand firm. And where will this church be in 10 years?

In 20 years? In 50 years? Philippians 4 tells you. If you want to stand firm, let me give you five ways in which you ought to stand firm.

Five ways in which we are to be people who are full of joy as the people of God in this place. Five signs, if you want, of a healthy church. So first of all, in verses 2 and 3, if you want to stand firm, be full of joy.

Then stick together. Stick together. Live in harmony with one another. You see, many a good work of God has been jeopardized by bad relationships between believers.

[3 : 42] And that's what's happening in Philippi when you're reading between the lines. And Paul isn't afraid to say so, is he? And Paul isn't afraid to name names.

Imagine how embarrassing that would have been on Sunday morning when you turned up at church in Philippi. Are you gathered, as was the custom, and someone said there's a letter from Paul, and somebody read it out to the congregation publicly.

There would be, wouldn't there, when you came to verse 2 of chapter 4, a couple of red faces in the congregation. Euodia and Syntyche. Paul is not afraid to name names.

He says, doesn't he, verse 2, I plead with you, Euodia, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. We don't know exactly what the blue was about.

We don't know what they disagreed about. We just know a little bit about the women. We know their names. Somebody's rather cheekily named them, I'm odious and so touchy.

[4 : 45] But I think that's a bit cruel. I don't think that's right. I don't think they were that sort of person at all. Read what Paul says there. He says, doesn't he, he really tells us they were godly women.

He calls them his co-workers, his fellow workers. He says, they've contended at my side, these women, in the cause of the gospel. They are committed Christians.

Whatever they've fallen out about, this is not some minor thing. He tells us that their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

In the Book of Life. These women are not busybodies. They're not troublemakers who find their way into church life. They're converted people.

Their names are written in God's Book of Life. And I think it's always important to remember that. When you've got a problem with someone in the church, we need to remember who we are.

[5 : 54] I was at a conference years ago, just when I'd become the minister here, and there was a man speaking whose job it was to train people for ministry. And he was telling about how he'd gone to preach for one of his former students, and the lecturer knew that there was a troublesome deacon in the congregation, and he wanted to find out how the young man was getting on.

And so he said to him, how are you getting on with old Mr. So-and-so? Ah, that old idiot, the young minister replied. And the professor said to him, said to his student, now remember, before the foundation of time, before the foundation of the world, God chose that old idiot.

And in the fullness of time, the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ, left the glory of heaven and came into the world to go to the cross, to bleed and die for that old idiot. And one day Jesus is coming back, and he's going to present his church to the Father, and he's going to present that old idiot to his Father.

And what is the Father going to say on that day? Who is this old idiot? He's not going to say, that is he. He's going to say, my son.

My son. And we need to remember that when we fall out with one another. When someone has hurt you, when someone is giving you a hard time in the church, we are people for whom Christ has shed his precious blood.

[7 : 27] We are people for whom Christ has died. If our names are in the Lamb's book of life, it is because Christ has died for us, and we need to remember that.

We don't exactly know what the disagreement was in Philippians 4. We don't know the details of Euodia and Syntyche's disagreement, and in one sense it doesn't matter, because whenever Christians fall out, it hinders the advance of the church.

And so this is a serious issue. So there will be disagreements in any church. There always will be. We'll never see eye to eye on every detail, on every issue. The secret is, is this, isn't it?

We need to disagree without being disagreeable. There are all sorts of different views about all sorts of things in a church like IPC. So we don't know exactly what the issue was in Philippi, but we do know that it was hindering the advance of the gospel.

Because Paul pleads with these women. He entreats these women. He says, it's got to be dealt with. Don't sweep it under the carpet. He puts their names into this letter and he pleads.

[8 : 43] He publicly pleads with these two women. He says, I plead with you, you odier, and I plead with you, Syntyche, to agree in the Lord. That's the issue, isn't it? That's the important thing, to be on the same page in the Lord.

There's loads of things that we can disagree about. Lots of things we won't see eye to eye on. But when it comes to the Lord and when it comes to the gospel, when it comes to the truths that are necessary for salvation, we need to be on the same page.

It's interesting, isn't it, that Paul names names, but he doesn't take sides. For him, it's not a matter of who is in the right and who is in the wrong. Whatever the rights and the wrongs are, he doesn't go into.

They just need to settle this dispute. They need to settle this dispute for the sake of the gospel. And if they can't settle it themselves, these godly women, then they need to get someone to help them sort it out.

Do you notice Paul appeals to someone, doesn't he? He says, I ask you, true companion, or yoke fellow. We don't know who that person was.

[9 : 59] Might be a play on words, yoke fellow by name, yoke fellow by nature, bringing people together. Help these women, whoever it might be, who is reading the letter out in public.

It might have been Luke, it might have been Epaphroditus, one of Paul's fellow workers. Whoever this fellow worker was, this true companion, if they can't sort it out themselves, ask him, go in and sort it out.

Because there's too much at stake. And when Christians fall out with one another in a church, the gospel is hindered, so it's a great matter of urgency. And do you notice what he says there in verse 4 as he's pleading with these women and pleading with this true fellow companion to help sort it out?

He says, sort it out because, verse 4, the Lord is near. Jesus isn't somewhere else. So when we slag one another off, and I'm not suggesting anyone's doing that at IPC, but when we slag one another off, Jesus isn't somewhere else.

When we gossip about someone behind their back, Jesus isn't somewhere else. He is, isn't he, the unseen guest at every meal. He is the silent listener to every conversation. The Lord is near to all.

[11 : 30] Jesus isn't somewhere else when all this is going on in a church. The Lord is near, and he's not only near spatially, not only is he present when his people gather, but he's coming back again, isn't it?

It could possibly mean that in verse 4. Would he really like Jesus to come back and find the church squabbling amongst themselves about something trivial, instead of getting on with the work of the gospel?

You see, it's a serious matter, isn't it? If we want to stand firm, if we want to have joy and be full of joy, then we need to stick together in the gospel. We need to have the same mind when it comes to the gospel.

Disharmony in church life hinders the gospel. Bad relationships between believers cause joy to evaporate. So do you just worry?

That's the second thing in verse 6. First thing, stick together in the gospel. Second thing, turn care into prayer. It's a bit twee, isn't it?

[12 : 37] But that is what it's saying. Turn care into prayer. That's what he says in verse 6. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.

Let your request be made known to God. I love what Corrie Ten Boom says about that. She says, let prayer be the steering wheel, not the spare tire.

And so often prayer is the spare tire, isn't it? You know what it's like if you've got a car, you've got a spare wheel under the boot maybe, and you've probably forgotten that it's there.

You just hope that you're never going to have to use it. And so you never pump air into the tire. And then when you need it, you get it out and it's flat. And our prayer life is like that sometimes, isn't it?

Mine is. Instead of being proactive in prayer, I'm reactive, and I leave it until there's some sort of crisis, we pray as a last resort.

[13 : 45] Do you see what Paul is saying here? He's saying be anxious about nothing, be prayerful about everything. Turn that worry list of yours into a prayer list. And why again?

Because verse 4, the Lord is at hand. He is near. You can pray without ceasing because he is there without ceasing. You can never say about Jesus what you can say about some of your friends.

Where was she when I needed her? Where was he when I needed her? You can never say that about Jesus. Because he is a very present help in trouble. He is never somewhere else, so you can call on him.

And you can pray to him without ceasing because he's there without ceasing. You've just sung it, haven't you? Oh, what peace we often forfeit.

Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to him in prayer. And of course, it follows on, doesn't it, from the first point of stick together.

[14 : 46] because your prayers and my prayers will not be heard if we're out of fellowship with other believers. Jesus taught us that in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

Do you remember what he said? He put it in the terms of his day. He said, if you're taking your gift to offer it at the altar, we might say if you're on your way to church Sunday morning, you're driving along or you're on the E1 getting here, and you're on your way to church and it's communion Sunday today and you're going to sit around the Lord's table as well together with your brothers and sisters in Christ and as you're making your way into church to worship God, you remember that your brother has got something against you.

Do you remember what Jesus says in Matthew 5? He says, you remember that your brother or sister has got something against you and make a mental note of it to sort it out in the week. Do something about that during the week?

If you can find the time? No, he says, if you are offering your guilt on the altar and you remember that your brother has got something against you, leave your guilt, leave your offering in front of the altar and first go and be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your guilt gift.

See what Jesus is saying? He's saying you can come to church and you can sing lustily and you can sing at the top of your voice, mouth. You can mouth the words of liturgy, you can have a wonderful time of worship but God says, I'm not listening to you.

[16:25] I'm not listening to you. Take away the noise of your singing. I don't want to hear it. If you're out of sorts with your brother or sister in Christ, your worship, it is not acceptable to me.

First, go and be reconciled and notice what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. Notice where he puts the responsibility. He says, if you're on your way to church and on your way to church, you realize that your brother has got something against you, you say, well, that's his problem, not mine. He's got something against me. That's his problem. No, Jesus says it's your problem. If you're aware that your brother has got something against you, you go and you be reconciled to your brother.

And then you can come and worship. And then you can pray and sing when that's sorted. When you have forgiven as you have been forgiven, then you can pray.

And then do you see what he says in Philippians 4? He says, and then verse 7, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Literally, it will guard, it will garrison.

[17:37] It's a military word, it will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus, those two control centers. It's a military metaphor, it's a battalion of soldiers which is surrounding a city to protect it.

And this is what the peace of God does, Paul says, the peace of God guards your heart and your mind. Look at what he says, what is he talking about?

What is the peace of God? Well, just look at verse 7 again with me. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.

That's where you find it. The peace of God isn't some kind of subjective thing. We come into a nice church building like this and we love the ambience and the feel of it.

The music might be rousing, it gives us a sense of well-being. Is that where you find the peace of God? No, you find it in the cross of Christ. Listen to what Tim Keller says to the American preacher.

[18:42] He says, if you are not at peace, if you are here this morning and you're not at peace, you are not thinking and you are not thanking. thinking. You are not thinking and you are not thanking.

And he says this, forgive the Americanism. He quotes a song that I've never heard before. He says, there is a stupid peace and there is a smart peace. Stupid peace says, ho, ho, ho, to the bottle I go. I heal my heart and drown my woe. I've never heard that before. That's escapism, isn't it? stupid.

That's stupid. You don't have to go to a bottle to find that kind of peace.

You can go to church. You can get on a high by being in a worship service. You can get on a high by singing very emotive worship songs.

But contrast that with the last hymn that we'll sing in our service after we've had communion. You know the story, don't you? I've told you before of Horatio Spafford. He lost almost his entire family in a transatlantic crossing.

[19:56] He'd lost his teenage son a year before losing him I think to leukemia. And then crossing the Atlantic, the boat went down and his four daughters were drowned.

His wife wired him the news from New York. And when Horatio Spafford heard that news, he wrote this hymn. Look what it says, verse 1, page 6 on the bulletin.

When peace like a river attends my way. And then the second line, when sorrows like sea billows roll. His darling daughters have been drowned in the Atlantic.

When sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot you have taught me to say it is well with my soul. How can he possibly say that? How can he find peace in those circumstances?

And then he goes on, doesn't he? And he says in verse 3, the joy of this glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more.

[21 : 07] Praise the Lord for my soul. What has that got to do with four little girls who drowned in the Atlantic? It's got everything to do with it.

Where do you find peace when you lose your darling daughters? Where do you find peace? On a worship CD? Where do you find peace in those circumstances?

Where do you go? You go to the cross. And you go to the God who has not spared his own son but gave him up for us all. If I can put it like this, we're on slightly dangerous ground here.

You look to the God of the Bible who lost his child so that you might be right with him. That is where you find it. Think about it.

That's what this man is doing in this hymn. He's thinking about the cross and about what Jesus has done for him. And on the cross that's where he found his peace. He thought about it and he was thankful for it.

[22 : 11] Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord oh my soul even in those circumstances. And so the Bible gives us a God who has lost his child so that we might be brought into his family.

And that is a peace which blows your mind. It passes all understanding that if you understand what Jesus has done for you on the cross it will guard your heart and mind.

Like a battalion of soldiers around a city it will protect you. Whatever happens, whatever circumstances come your way. that leads me to my third point.

How are you going to stand firm? You stick together in the gospel, you turn care into prayer and then the third thing he says is think holy thoughts. Because the battle is the battle for the mind. Look at verses 8 and 9 what he says there.

Put these verses on your laptop. There is nothing is there that will rob you of your joy if you fill your minds with junk.

[23 : 20] If you eat junk food all the time in the end it will kill you. If you eat it long enough. And that's the same for the mind. Let this be your guide as you think. What's on the internet?

What's on Netflix tonight? What can we watch? Can you see it? Verse 8, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's anything, any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Now I can't think of a more accurate description of YouTube Reels than anywhere else. Can you? YouTube Reels, there's nothing more just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise than Instagram, is there?

Be real, is that all right? Paul says whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy, think about these things.

Do you know those words of Philippians 4 verse 8 were chiseled into the stone of Broadcasting House in London when the BBC was opened.

[24 : 35] And he says this, doesn't he, Paul, whatever you've learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice and the God of peace will be with you. Paul is the very model of a gospel minded man.

He's put himself out there as a model. Do you know what it's like to have holy thoughts, to dwell on things that are excellent, pure, lovely, praiseworthy?

Paul says, follow me, if you've seen it in me. Paul understands what you and I need to understand is what fills our minds shapes our lives.

And so somebody has said, you are not what you think you are, but what you think you are. And so we wonder, don't we? We throw our hands up at a society that is so violent and has so much sexual violence in society.

I don't know why we're surprised when people watch what they do. And so the challenge is for me, isn't it? And for you, what am I feeding my mind on? What is my mind on?

[25 : 42] If you want to be a joyful person and live together in harmony with other believers and turn your cares into prayers and think holy thoughts and then fourthly, learn the secret of contentment. Look at verses 11 to 13.

I have learned. And so we need to say, don't we, that none of us is naturally content. It was this issue that the apostle Paul struggled with more than anything else.

If you knew the apostle Paul before he became a Christian, he would have looked like he had his life together. He was a bit like the rich young ruler in the gospels.

Outwardly, he lived a perfect life. He boasted about it in the first part of chapter three. He was the good guy, and there's a number of places in the New Testament where Paul gives us his story.

We saw it last week. But in Acts, he gives it twice. he says, what happened to me? What was I like before I fell in love with Christ?

[26 : 41] He does it in Romans 7 as well. He tells us his story. And in Romans 7, he says, before I became a Christian, the big sin in my life was coveting.

I wouldn't have known what sin is, he says, apart from the law, for I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had said you shall not covet. But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment produced in me every kind of coveting.

You see, Paul was convicted by sin, by the sin of coveting, grasping. How much money do we need to be happy? According to the BBC, it is 120,000.

is the best that it gets. We are not naturally happy people. We are not naturally content. We always want a little bit more. It doesn't matter how much we've got.

We always want a little bit more. And Paul says, that's exactly what I was like before I became a Christian. I didn't realize it until the law convicted me. I didn't realize I was a covetous person.

[27 : 55] I wasn't content, but I've had to learn to be content. content. And there's only one way to learn contentment, and that's the hard way. Whatever the circumstances, Paul says, I know what it is to be content, I know what it is to be in need, I've been there, I know what it is to be in plenty, I've been there too, I've learned the secret of being content in any and every circumstance, in every situation, I know what it is to have plenty and to have nothing, I know what it is to be brought low, I know what it is to abound.

I can cope with all these circumstances and do you see what he says? Through him who gives me strength. I can do all things, verse 13, through him who gives me strength.

And that's the secret of contentment. I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look, full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

That's Paul's testimony. Chapter 3, he says, didn't he, the things I used to boast about, the things that I thought were gained to me, I've now counted them as loss, I'm embarrassed by them.

In fact, all those things that used to fascinate me, all those things I used to boast about, they are just a pile of smelling dung compared with the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

[29 : 29] It's really strong language, it's stronger than what I just said. In fact, Paul says, I want to know him, he's been a Christian for 30 years and he's still hungry for the Lord Jesus.

I want to know him and the power of his resurrection so that I might share in his sufferings. It's interesting, the order of that, isn't it? You know the cross comes before the resurrection.

Everybody knows that, don't they? Good Friday comes before Easter Sunday. So, why does Paul put it the other way around when he speaks about his experience? Oh, that I might know him and the power of his resurrection.

Well, Paul, why do you need that spiritual power of resurrection in your life? Why do you need the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead in your life, he says, so that I might share in his sufferings?

That's why I need it. I can't do it in my own strength. I need the power of the resurrection to be in this stinking prison to suffer for Christ. You see, I'm a content in this prison through him who strengthens me.

[30 : 39] whatever the circumstances, if they throw away the key, if I never get out of this place, if I'm executed tomorrow, I'm okay with that, I'm content. Because for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

If I get out of here and have a good life, whatever happens, I've learned to be content. So stick together, turn care into prayer, think holy thoughts, learn to be content, and then finally, practice generosity.

That's verses 14 to 23. And Paul finishes the letter on the touchy subject of money. And he gives thanks to the Philippians for their giving. In some ways it reads like a receipt, doesn't it?

Verse 18. Look at verse 19. Verse 18, I've received full payment and more. I'm well supplied.

Having received from Epaphroditus the gifts that you've sent.

It's almost like an official receipt. But it's much more than that. See how he describes their giving?

He describes it, doesn't he? Verse 18, as a fragrant offering, an acceptable worship and praising to God, pleasing to God.

