

Piecing Together Our Peace

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[0 : 00] That chapter there in front of you, that's where we're going to be spending our time together this evening. I've got a question for you just as we begin, and it's this. How content do you feel in life?

And let's say it's between 0 and 10. How would you answer that? How content do you feel in life? And now let's push it on.

I've got another question for you. What would it take for a number to drop down? And say if you're one of those people who were in the 6 and above, what would it take you to knock you down into the bottom half?

And this question feels quite pertinent for us because as we were driving up this evening, there's a part where we have to go across the A90. And just as I was in the middle waiting to see if any cars are coming, a van came up behind us and clipped the back of the car.

And I can tell you at that point, I was not feeling particularly content. It was knocking me over. But the question is, what would it take to knock you back? I don't know about many of those who are here tonight, but I feel like we just live at the moment in kind of a simmering tension.

[1 : 11] It's not like we have seasons of peace and bad moments, but we're always living knowing that something can upset us in a moment.

Just by looking at the news or talking with our friends, there's always something going on and you feel ill at ease. And some of you might have seen that the word for the year last year was the word permacrisis.

For any English nerds, they won't like why that word is. You can talk to me afterwards if you're one of those. But this idea that it always feels like there is a crisis happening.

There is always something that is unsettling our peace and our contentedness. And I think that's why this chapter is so beautiful and important for us as God's people.

We worked through Philippians last year as a church, and as we were working through this, the kind of title I gave for this series was Gospel Centered Church. And it might seem slightly clichéd, especially if you're in certain circles and hear that kind of language regularly.

[2 : 26] But actually, I think it really is the right way to title this. Because what Paul is doing all throughout this letter is he's trying to apply the gospel into the situation in which they're living in.

Not just apply it, but help them to understand how the gospel is central, not just to their salvation, not just to their relationship with God, but who they are together as a church and how they live as a church.

One verse 27 is probably one of the key verses for this whole letter. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. And the golden core of that gospel is the grace of God.

If you were here last week, well done for getting through the whole time together. We went through the whole of chapter three. And it is a dense passage. It's hard to kind of follow the logic.

Well done for staying with me all of last week, especially if you didn't fall asleep. Extra marks for that. I think I'd encourage Joe to have a look at this in another time in smaller chunks.

[3 : 37] But it's helpful sometimes to look at the broader thing. But if the only thing you took away from last week is how precious the grace of God is for you and for your life, that is it.

Because you see, what we see is the grace of God does not find us when we've climbed our way to the top of the ladder, but it finds us in the gutter when we're face down in the mud.

And the way of grace calls us to take the lowly path of Jesus, our humble Savior. Maybe I'll put it like this.

For the whole of what we're seeing in Philippians, I'll put it in this way, and hopefully we'll see this as we work our way throughout this, is gospel harmony is held together by gospel humility.

Gospel harmony is held together by gospel humility. And what Paul wants them to see is, at the center of that, gospel harmony and gospel humility is the peace that we find in the grace of God.

[4 : 39] So for this evening, if you're a note taker, I've got three points for us. And the first one that we see is, Paul seeking to reestablish the peace in the church, reestablishing peace.

And we see this in verses 2 and 3. Disharmony in any organization hinders its work, doesn't it? When different members and employees, where bosses and those are under them, aren't talking, when there's friction, that never leads to good results.

And disharmony also hinders our witness together as a church. You remember what Jesus said to his disciples? He says, it is by your love for one another that people will know that you are my disciples, that you belong to God.

And so this is Paul's concern here in this opening part of chapter 4. When he addresses one particular situation in the church in Philippi.

[5 : 46] And what he wants to do is reestablish the peace there. Have a look at me then at verse 2. I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

I don't know if any of you have had experience of being in a church or maybe being in a mission team where you've seen disharmony like this. I remember in the first couple of years of being a Christian, being in a group, we were doing outreach into a small town in Ireland.

It was a football outreach. And by the end of the week, a number of our team weren't talking with each other anymore. It made the plans in the morning really hard to do because you had to make sure certain people weren't on the same teams, they weren't doing the same activities together. People were grumpy and you could feel the weight on top of us. I remember talking to someone a few years ago who was, he'd come to visit our church and he was telling me, we're having a long conversation, he was telling me about how there was, he and one lady in his church back at home hadn't talked to each other for decades.

Everyone always felt on edge and he just couldn't see any way that they could be reconciled, how they could work together. Some of you have been in that situation, you know, where there's two people in a group and everyone's, feels like they're on ice.

[7 : 09] That's the kind of situation that Paul is writing into here where Euodia and Sinitica have fallen out together. Now, I think, I think I'm on safe grounds here saying that I don't think there's any kind of core doctrine of the Christian faith that they've fallen out about.

If it was something to do with the deity of Jesus or the importance of justification by faith alone, Paul would step in and tell us who was wrong.

But I don't think that's what is going on here. So often we can make what we disagree about into something that belongs to the core of the Christian faith. But I don't think that is what is going on here.

Who knows what's happened? One person might have gotten their way in an annual general meeting or, you know, one person made an ill-conceived remark. But that's not what Paul's concern is here.

You see, what Paul does is he applies the gospel to their situation. Have a look at me again at verse 2. You see what he says there? To be of the same mind in the Lord.

[8 : 18] Remember, we said that that was a kind of a key phrase that we've seen throughout Philippians last week. Have a look with me at 2, verse 5. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

You see, what Paul says is gospel harmony comes about from gospel humility. What he's saying is he points to the gospel.

He points us to Jesus and what he's done. Jesus who left the riches of his heavenly throne to come to the earth, to be rejected, to live a lowly, impoverished life.

And you see what he's saying here? In this friction within the church, he's saying, take on the same mindset as Jesus, as we know in the gospel. He's saying, Jesus, who though he was rejected by many, gave his life so that they may have life.

And this is what he's saying. Lay aside your concerns and seek the good and the benefits of others. That's what he said way back in chapter 2 again, chapter 2, verse 3.

[9 : 25] Do nothing else of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves. Not look into your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others.

Paul is saying, put the interests of others above yourselves because you are on the same team. You have been united together with a mission to contend for the faith of the gospel, to make Jesus known in your communities.

And your disharmony would suggest that you don't serve one God who unites his people together. You are hurting yourselves and you are hurting the church and those who are around you.

So he speaks to them, but he also speaks to others. Have a look at verse 3. And he says, yes, I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel.

Do you see that there where he says, actually, this is not just for the two of them. Let's just lock them into a room and let them fight it out and whoever does it, they win and we leave it to that. Actually, this is for the whole church to come around because this damages the whole church, not just these two women.

[10 : 43] Paul gives us remarkably little detail here. And I think we've got to use, when we come into these situations, we've got to use the wisdom and the rest of the word, guided by the Spirit.

You see, there's no cookie-cutter solution. Each scenario has different characters, different elements involved. But this is an issue for all the church.

And this is what Paul says, the reason why they must come together. Look at the ends of verse 3. They have contended at my side for the cause of the gospel, along with Clemens and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

You see, here's the thing. They are gospel people together because they are those who have put their faith in Jesus. He's saying, what defines you most is not that issue that has caused you to stop speaking.

What your identity is built in is nothing other apart from the fact that Jesus is your Lord and Savior, and Jesus is her Lord and Savior.

[11 : 54] So maybe for anyone who is here tonight, who might be in that situation, here's a reminder to you. That person that agitates you, that person you might have fallen out with, they have the same Heavenly Father as you do.

They have been loved by Him like you have. So join with Him. He received worse and showed greater love, and He invites us to do the same.

So what Paul wants to do in the church, then, is he's seeking to re-establish peace. What he wants us to do is he wants to help us to find peace as well. He wants us to find peace, and we see that in verses 4 to 9.

I mentioned, didn't I, that kind of simmering anxiety in which we seem to live in. And lastly, I can remember just a short period of time where reading the newspaper in the morning, it was around the time in the build-up to the elections in Brazil, and Bolsonaro, now the former president, talked about how the election was a battle between good and evil.

Now imagine if you're thinking to yourself, every time you go into election, you've got to choose between what is good and what is evil. It ups the stakes, it gets the heartbeat racing, and you're thinking, this is a lot on my shoulders, isn't it?

[13 : 20] Thinking in the lead-up to the winter when Nicola Sturgeon was talking about an impending humanitarian crisis in Scotland. Previously, humanitarian crisis was only used to describe the scenes that we saw of extreme poverty in places like Africa.

And suddenly you're thinking, that's the kind of situation that we are heading into. Or one, when I was on a train and I was listening to a group talking together, and the end of the conclusion of what they were saying is that all Tories are fascists.

I don't know where you stand on that, that's your own opinion tonight. But when you're thinking that a political party are fascists, that ups the ante, doesn't it?

The volume goes up. And when you're thinking, this is the kind of noise and volume you're hearing all the time, it's hard to find any peace or contentedness, isn't it?

When you add into that all the pressures at work, all the pressures at university, the struggles at home, financial concerns that we have, and you think to yourself, where is there peace?

[14 : 27] When can I just maybe have a week? Or even just give me a day. A day where I don't have to be worried about this. And what Paul wants to do for us is he wants to help us to find the

place of true contentedness, of lasting peace.

Verse 4, Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. And what hinders us from rejoicing? It's not being at peace, isn't it?

And so Paul then here gives us three ways that we can know true, abiding, untarnished peace.

And the first, and it seems so obvious, pray. Verse 6, Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

It's so obvious, isn't it? It's so obvious that I'm not going to lambast anyone here tonight because this is the same thing that I fall into time and time again.

[15:45] Where something comes up and it's only maybe the 7th or the 8th option that I choose. Think, maybe I should pray about this. When your toddler is screaming, when a car clips you when you're driving.

That's just me, recently. And you think to yourself, what can I do? And what God invites us to do is to come to him as our heavenly father, knowing that he delights to bend his ear to your prayers when you come to him in Christ.

And what he says to us is when we pray, we will receive that peace. Have a look at verse 7. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And that word there for guard, it's kind of, he's invoking a picture of an army barracks. He's invoking a picture of the high walls that protect those who are inside.

And you see, what Paul is saying to us here is the peace of God surrounds our hearts like an impenetrable force. Arrows, spears, cannons, guns cannot break through the peace of God that God gives to us.

[17:16] the peace that transcends all understanding. And so, we are invited again to come to God in prayer knowing that when we come to him he pours out his peace upon us.

And the other things that he tells us to do are we are invited to consider and practice. What is it that we are to consider? Have a look at verse 8.

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, consider such things.

I'll put it this way and then I'll try to illustrate and explain it for you. Our experience of peace is rooted in a relational peace.

peace. Our experience of peace is rooted in a relational peace. Maybe try to think of me about it in these ways.

[18:22] Two countries are at war. You live in one of the countries that's been invaded. Now think what it's like to go to sleep each night.

When you're hearing on the radio that tanks are coming towards your city. When you've heard of stories of people's houses or apartments being bombed at night, imagine what the heart is like then. There is not just that simmering but bubbling anxiety in which you live. And you see, the only way for that to be alleviated is to see the two countries come to peace together.

And I'm not talking about a truce, a truce which lasts for a few days which gives you a moment of quiet but you're always thinking when is this going to end? True peace comes when the two countries come together and sign peace and war ends.

And you see, the experience of peace we get is when we know the relational peace that we have with God. You see, the ultimate thing that brings fear and anxiety is the broken relationship that humanity has with God.

[19:47] And what Paul has reminded us throughout this letter, what we see throughout the scriptures is that Jesus has secured our peace with God on the cross.

and that means that we are at peace with the one who rules and reigns, who by his providence and in his sovereignty is in total control, not just of the here and now but the ever after.

He rules, he reigns of all authority and we are reconciled to him as our heavenly father. And this is what Paul is kind of trying to draw us to, to consider all these things which are beautiful, which are just, which are true, to remind ourselves of the core of the gospel.

And he doesn't just say, don't just consider these things, practice what you have seen in us. You see that there in verse nine, 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.

And you see what he wants to do then in this final bit that we're going to see living in peace is he points towards his own example, inviting us to consider what his life is like and inviting us to practice the ways of grace in which he lives.

[21 : 20] That's our final point this evening that we're going to be looking at together, is living in peace. peace. Now I know, and we'll see if we can test some memories of those of you who were here a couple of Sundays ago in the morning, Joe gave an illustration about a guy called Michael Norton who'd done some research.

Let's see if any of you can remember it. It's this research about he interviewed millionaires and he asked them how much more money would you need to be perfectly content?

I wonder if any of you can remember the answer. It was always at least two to three times more than what they actually had. So if someone had a million pounds they'd say if I had two or three million then I think I'd be all right then.

I wouldn't need any more. If someone had three million they'd say probably about six or nine million. That would be great. Or if someone had nine million they'd say 18 to 27 million. My maths isn't very good after that point.

What is it that would lead you to full contentment? Is there a number that would lead you there? So much of our lives is determined by comparing ourselves to other situations isn't it?

[22 : 39] You see one of the things that research found is that it wasn't the money they had but the people they spent time with that impacted their uncontentedness.

If millionaires hung out with other millionaires then it drastically reduced the value of the money that they had in their minds how much it helped their own hearts. And what Paul wants to say is forget about comparing yourselves to other people and remember who you are and what you have in Christ.

So often it's money that can set our hearts erasing isn't it? Which cause us to wake up in the middle of the night worried. And what Paul wants to say is you have something richer in Jesus.

Where is the secret to contentment? It's in peace with God. It's in the peace of God. It's with the God of peace.

Jeremiah Burrs he was a Puritan writer and he defines contentedness like this. Christian contentment is that sweet inward quiet gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.

[24 : 11] You see Christian contentment is the heart that knows that God is our father. The good father who gives good gifts. The good father who rules in heaven and loves his people.

The good father who only wants good and flourishing for his sons and daughters. I don't know when as we were reading through this verses 10 to 19 did you find it slightly strange that Paul simultaneously thanks them for the gifts that he's received and also at the same time says no but I don't really actually need them.

We're only a few weeks removed from Christmas and you imagine can't you you went into all this effort sacrificially gave went into debt to buy a present for somebody and they said oh this is really nice but I actually don't really need this doesn't really do me any good you'd be thinking what's that about but you see what Paul is trying to teach us to model us what true contentment looks like you see actually in one way this letter that he's writing to the Philippians is like a prayer letter you see it's been occasioned by the fact that the church in Philippi have given financially to help Paul while he's in prison you see Paul has gone into prison and it's not like prison nowadays where each prisoner has rights when they went in their lives depended on and the church in Philippi have committed themselves to supporting Paul knowing that he is a partner in the gospel with them and so what we see then is

Paul is he's saying verse 11 I am not saying this because I am need for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty I have learned the secrets of being content in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry whether living in plenty or in want and one thing that we might point to here and I think this is where it slightly challenges us a little bit do you notice that he says contentedness is challenged both by poverty and by wealth so often we think that contentedness happens when we get enough money but what Paul is saying is contentedness has nothing to do with what we have actually in fact having much money is of more harm to the peace in our hearts maybe sometimes than extreme poverty money does not help us with our contentedness and so this passage is just as much for the successful amongst us as the suffering but is

Paul being all kind of zen like here is he crossing his legs finding a nice little quiet room in his house and just shutting off his mind forgetting about everything that's going on in his life no he's not being zen like Paul here is being Christ like you see contentedness isn't a holy resignation but it is a deep trust in God's goodness and power Paul is saying here Paul is saying he is seeing contentedness and knows contentedness in Christ that's what verse 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength and he knows contentedness in his life and he wants to encourage it because he's seeing it in the lives in the worship and in the giving of the church in Philippi Paul is saying he's seeing contentedness in their church and he's deeply thankful for their partnership with him in his suffering in his poverty he's thankful for them for their generosity to him out of their own struggles you see what he talks about there in verse 15 moreover as you

[28 : 35] Philippians know in the early days of your acquaintance to the gospel when I set out from Macedonia not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you only for even when I was in Thessalonica you sent me aid more than once when I was in need you see living in peace means sacrificial generosity it means putting your needs above others putting selfish ambition to the sides and walking in the humble footsteps of Jesus in one of Paul's other letters his letter to the Corinthians second Corinthians chapter 8 we learn here that the church in Philippi this money that they gave they actually gave out of their poverty this is a people who couldn't afford to support him yet because of their partnership in the gospel knowing his desperate straits they said he is one of us and we want to support him

I know of a new church plant and they were gathering together the core team and they were talking about what their core values were going to be as a church as they sought to live in their community to be a witness to Jesus and working through this letter one of the things that they wrote down as one of their five core values was this was sacrificial generosity you you you you see they saw that this was a key part of living together on mission contending together for the gospel standing side by side in the faith of Jesus was this sacrificial generosity seeking to support gospel work not just in their own church in their own congregation but all across the globe and have a look at why that is verses 18 to 19 see the language that's used here

I've received full payment and more than enough I'm amply supplied now that I've received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent and look at this language here they are a fragrant offering an acceptable sacrifice pleasing to God this is the language of worship you see living in peace giving sacrificially to the work of the gospel supporting those who are in need their financial partnership their partnership in the gospel with Paul is a key act of their worship together as a church and so sacrificial generosity is a sign it's a symptom of a heart that is at peace because sacrificial generosity says this my life my peace my contentedness will not be determined by my bank accounts it will not be determined by the financial forecasts but it will be determined solely by the God of peace who loves me and knows me and cares for me and has secured my future for me and back to verse 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength Paul says that I know the strength that I've got from God and that same strength is available to all of us this is not just for the hyper spiritual apostle but it's available to everyone in the pews all those who know Jesus know God as their father indwelt by the spirit God can strengthen us God can strengthen our peace and our contentedness as we seek to live for him and so Paul ends then on the only note that he can end to God and to our

God and father be glory forever and ever because it's to him that belongs all praise because he is the one who is with us knows us and promises us his perfect and everlasting peace so following Paul's line let's pray to him now