

Imagine for a moment a beach [slide2] with beautiful golden white sand stretching off into the distance, coconut palms lazily swaying in the breeze. The water is crystal clear. The only sounds are the sounds of the ocean, and the wind in the trees. What words describe that scene?

Idyllic, calm, serene, peaceful.

We live in a world which is hungry for a sense of peace. The rise of mindfulness, adult colouring, and decluttering all betray a deep longing for peace.

Leave it all behind, and melt into a quiet state of inner peace.

Today we will look much deeper than a fading inner peace, as we look at the calls of Paul for us to “Rejoice” no matter what comes our way and seek [slide 3] a deep and lasting peace through our trust in Jesus. We’ll think about how we can enjoy the things of this life in the light of that peace and Paul’s deep thankfulness for the work Jesus is doing in the Philippian church as they give sacrificially to advance the Gospel.

Pray

- 1) **Peace; Real Peace** [slide 4] These words have been a familiar refrain throughout the letter Paul has written to the Philippians v.4 “rejoice”. Twice in the opening phrase of his conclusion Paul calls on the Philippian church to have joy, in the Lord.

He isn’t calling Christians to promulgate plastic smiles, or fake cheeriness, but a deep joy. Rejoice as you remember your dual citizenship, of earth and heaven. The joy that all Christians are to work at cultivating stems from us lifting our eyes, beyond the here and now, to our eternal future. To give thanks for God’s unmerited grace. We know the truth of our freedom in Jesus Christ (that there is no condemnation for those of us in Christ Jesus). This great truth should stir our hearts, love for Christ should be welling up in us, that such a cost was paid for us; that truth should make us more thankful than our words can express.

That's not easy! For the Philippians that was a hard ask. As we've journeyed with them week by week we've seen the depth of their suffering, the cost of their faith, it is painful for them to follow the Lord Jesus.

Suffering was the foundation that was laid for their church in Acts 16. The call for them to rejoice is a call for them to focus on the ultimate truth which underpins this whole book 1:6 'that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ' & 4:19 'God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.'

We can rejoice, we can be gentle, because Jesus hasn't forgotten us. He is near. He is returning. On the final day, that terrible day of judgement when all will acknowledge Jesus as Lord - the gentle, the joy filled, the faithful ones, our dear brothers and sisters who lived at Philippi, the Apostle Paul, even us friends, faithful ones who trust in King Jesus, we will be vindicated.

What change that makes! What hope that gives. What freedom. What an ability to let go of our worry and anxiety. What great news for the Philippians.

Living as Christ; Proclaiming the saving message of the Lord Jesus has hurt them. It is costing them, as they try to hold together, a minority religion. Their faith in Jesus and refusal to live as the world around them is costing them in their relationships with others, it's certainly hurting their businesses, their careers and educations are curtailed, some have paid with their very lives. For a decade these Christians have been bearing the cost. Financially they are a poor church.

they are reminded" Do not worry about anything" but bring your needs, your trials, your troubles to Jesus in prayer, with thanksgiving.

When life is hard, come to Jesus: the Creator of the universe who had nowhere to lay his head, but is making many rooms in his Father's house.

The provider for all, whose disciples started to panic when they realised they didn't have any food forgetting he could feed 5,000 with a few fish and a couple of bread rolls. Come to him in prayer presenting your needs.

As we come and handover the things that weigh us down we admit that we aren't God, that we need his help. Look at what we exchange our worriers for v.7 A peace which surpasses all understanding. It will guard our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus.

This peace, this sense of security and safety, isn't the peace of the world. Knowing that we are safe in the Lord Jesus, is greater than our deepest fears and anxieties. The things that keep us awake at night, the things that gnaw away at us while we sit here on a Sunday morning, the fears and worries which crowd us and hold us captive can't compete with the peace we find in Jesus when we come to him in trust and prayer.

That peace isn't the cheap peace found on a beach. That's not the peace that comes from a full enough wallet. That's not the peace that comes from having a significant other we can dote on. That's not the peace that comes from a good grade, time with grandchildren.

That is the peace that is far beyond what we can see in front of us. A peace rooted in trust.

The Philippians faced life or death at times, this peace is real comfort. It's not an escape from their pain or suffering, but it is a hope. They can hold firmly to their Rock, they needn't be anxious about tomorrow, about what they will eat or drink, they needn't be worried about their future "I am preparing a place for you in my father's house." They can trust Jesus with their needs for today, and for their eternal futures. We can trust Jesus with our needs for today, and our eternal futures.

What a difference that makes.

That difference which allows us to obey his good and glorious word. To hold fast to the word of life. To stand firm v.9 to keep on doing the things we have learned, and received and heard and seen in Paul. Because then too, when we obey the teaching of Christ, the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints, we can live differently.

Instead of clinging to the ways of the world hoping that the earthly recipes for success will bring us what we need and satisfy our desires we can cling to the Rock; King Jesus. We can trust that even in our toughest and darkest moments God is at work for our good. We can trust him, because he loves us. Because he died for us.

Throughout this journey in the book of Philippians we've seen time and time again the call to be different. For the Philippians to live as Christ; means they have different sexual ethics, a different approach to alcohol, to generosity, for caring for the poor, they uproot the class and social systems, they give women and slaves a respect and status that is unconscionable to the Roman mind; they handle their wealth differently, they give sacrificially, they put on an eternal mindset.

Boy it hurts. It was costly then, and it's costly now.

I have a Christian friend who is attracted to other men. To the glory of God he lives in a way that is consistent with the Bible's teaching. He is attracted to other men, but he is single. He knows that he never will have that person to share life with that many of us long for. He told me how he has been feeling as his city has rolled out masses of Rainbow flags. How oppressive that symbol is for him.

How much it pressures him to seek peace somewhere other than Jesus. He knows that if he took his eyes off Jesus, and decided to seek peace in his attraction he would be seen as a "hero" as "courageous" and "brave", but my dear brother in Christ looks to a greater vision, a vision of the future with Jesus where he lives with his heavenly King, who never married, who never had a sexual relationship, who trusted the word of Life given by his Father in heaven, who will fully satisfy his every deepest need in Christ Jesus.

That's costly isn't it? That hurts, to live as Christ, to say no to the temporary and passing peace of this world.

We all struggle, seeking temporary peace in ways which aren't pleasing to God. I'm sure of that, because I know myself. If you are flailing, if you feel like you are slipping under, and those struggles, struggles of same-sex attraction, or addiction,

or anger, or resentment, or working 70 hours a week, or a thousand other secret dark places we might seek peace; dear brother or sister come to the Lord Jesus. Come for prayer. Ask for help. There is no condemnation here. There is no judgement or shaming, there is a Lord and saviour, who while we were still sinners died for us.

He is the one who breaks the power of death, and isolation, and loneliness and fear and wants us as Paul makes clear to change our whole outlook.

2) Living in light of that peace

As we live in the light of that peace we live as people who renew our minds: v.8. whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things

Paul takes and reframes the very best moral standard the of Roman world and turns it upside down. The Roman hearer would assume Paul meant they should seek self-sufficiency, where they relied only on themselves developing a strong moral compass driven by virtue, loyalty and discipline which would lead to contentment. Paul's contentment is based on the sufficiency of Jesus.

Paul wants us to pursue the best this life has to offer, we're meant to engage in admirable things, in the light of the cross.

We don't have to deny ourselves every pleasure, or enjoyment like the greek ascetics did. We don't have to live monastic lives of dry bread and cold stone rooms, we can set our minds on things that are lovely; and excellent and worthy of praise in this life. We are encouraged to consider what is noble and praiseworthy, as long as it conforms to what we have learned and seen in Jesus.

Paul has learned contentment, v.11 and whether he has had little or plenty, he has looked to Jesus for strength.

Want (not having enough) or wealth can both be all consuming.

When we don't have enough we can be absolutely over-run by anxiety. Unable to move almost, because we are so fearful about how we will get by.

-people here-

We mustn't be so overwhelmed by our want that we take our eyes off Jesus.

When we have far more than we need we can be absolutely over-run by luxury.

Enjoying the finer things of life, feeling safe and secure.

-people here-

We mustn't be so overwhelmed by wealth that we take our eyes off Jesus.

Paul has known both. He has been hungry, he has been well fed, he has had plenty, he has had little, he has always remained focussed on Jesus Christ. He has advanced the gospel. He has lived as Christ, proclaiming the Good News and not getting caught up in the cares of this world. He keeps looking to that future hope, which shapes his present reality: for him to live is X, to die is gain. We can get there! We can be content when we fix our eyes on the sufficient Lord Jesus.

3) a Sacrificial gift

A final note before I wrap up this whole series. In vv.15-18, we see that the Philippians themselves have supplied Paul's needs a number of times. Because of that he has great joy. He has great joy, not at receiving the gift, not at getting the cash they sent, but look at v.17 - he is overjoyed at the work of Jesus in them. The fruit that is growing in their lives, which allows them to give so generously "Not that I seek the gift, but the profit that accumulates to your account" he is tremendously grateful, but his joy is at their sacrificial giving to advance the gospel. It shows their trust in Jesus. This poor church, have stepped out in faith, and sent what they could to aid Paul in a difficult time.

Living as Christ, proclaiming the good news of Jesus, striving to live in unity has not been easy for the Philippian church. It's not easy for us. When we preach, when we speak of our faith people will mock us, we may face scorn or derision. As we seek unity we will have to give up our preferences and likes, we will have to disinvest ourselves of power and hand it to others, that will hurt. As we trust in the sufficiency of Jesus instead of our own striving,

that will feel very uncomfortable. Don't stop. Don't give up. Rejoice. Look at what is ours. Peace that surpasses all understanding. Contentment. Lasting joy.

It won't just happen, we won't wake up one day and have this all together, but as we labour as we look to our heavenly King Jesus and live as citizens of heaven on earth, holding fast to what we've been taught - we will advance the gospel and in our lives and actions we will crying out "To our God and father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Pray