

Reconcile and Rejoice

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Bible Verse: Philippians 4:1-5
Preached on: Sunday, January 17, 2021

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Well, our Scripture text for this morning's message comes from the book of Philippians 4, beginning in verse 1, and I invite you to turn there. For the rest of this month on Sunday and on Tuesday, we are going to be in the book of Philippians 4, finishing the book of Philippians, Lord willing, by the final Sunday in January, and we've built up to really just some marvelous climax in the things that are to come. We see in today's text an emphasis on joy. On Tuesday, we're going to see the emphasis on being anxious for nothing. And then on the following Sunday, thinking on what is true and right and lovely and practicing all of these things. And so I can only encourage you to make it a point to be under the word of God and to be with the people of God and especially in times like this. You know, I mean, you know, it's no secret that there's a lot of distraction around in our lives these days and that makes it so very vital for us to be under the word of God on a consistent basis. It makes your presence here so very important for your own spiritual life. We need the word of God to balance out all of the things that are competing for our attention in times like this, and so for the sake of your own soul, I encourage you to be consistent in your intake with God's word because that is the only place that is going to lead you to stability and right thinking in times such as these.

Our text is Philippians 4:1-5 and the Apostle Paul says this, he says,

1 Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. 2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. 3 Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

You know, if you were to ask anyone, certainly on the street and most people within the church, about what's most important or what they're thinking about, things of contemporary events would be coming out of their mouths in times like this, and to a degree I understand that, but it's my responsibility as a pastor to point your minds back to the word of God and to what the emphasis of the word of God is and what is of strategic importance to God as he has expressed his priorities in the word. And you know, you'll

find nothing about contemporary politics mentioned in Scripture. Oh, there's principles by which we respond to things but the passing politics of man are not the preoccupation of Scripture and it's very helpful and necessary for you and I to realize that and to shape our thinking and our response and our priorities in accordance with that. It will surprise you, I believe in what I'm about to say, what the word of God repeatedly puts an emphasis on when it talks about Christ and the work of Christ and his people. Repeatedly over and over again, Scripture makes a very high priority of that which has no value or currency in the world whatsoever, and again and again and again, Scripture puts emphasis on the unity of God's people, the harmony of God's people living together in peace and in love with one another.

If you'll look at the gospel of John 17, you'll see that on the eve of his crucifixion, the Lord Jesus Christ had this preeminently in his mind. As he was praying to his heavenly Father, as he was about to undergo crucifixion to bear the sins of his people for all time, Jesus was praying and he asked something from his Father for his people. In John 17:20, he said, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me." Jesus said earlier that, "They will know that you're My disciples if you keep My commandments, if you have love for one another." And Scripture puts this emphasis on the oneness, the essential oneness of the people of God, and then proceeds to tell us that we are to live that out in our relationships with one another.

Look at a passage that we've considered a number of times, Ephesians 4, by way of reminder and introduction to these things. When you think of the book of Ephesians, it's good and right that you think about the great doctrines that are presented in the first three chapters, the doctrines of election and redemption and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We're saved by grace through faith, that not of ourselves, not as a result of works lest any man should boast, and Scripture speaks in these terms and these great doctrines, and it ends, that first half of Ephesians ends in chapter 3, verses 20 to 21 with this prayer and this benediction, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

Now here is what I want you to think about and to understand and grasp. Paul, having laid forth this great blessedness that is ours in Christ, this great blessedness of being chosen and adopted into the family of God, where does he go having completed the first half of the book? This is so very important for us to understand. Chapter 4, verse 1, he says, "Therefore, as a consequence of all of the doctrinal truth that I have laid out in these first three chapters, here's where we go with that. Here's what I want to emphasize. This is what the Spirit of God prompts and directs His people to consider." Chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." And what is that? What is preeminent in his

mind? Beloved, it has nothing to do with secular politics. It has nothing to do with the passing matters of this world. He says in verse 2, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." God is concerned about the peace and the unity and the harmony of his people as they live together, as they go through life together as a body. This is the emphasis of Scripture again and again.

And just for one more example before we get to the book of Philippians, turn over to the book of Titus 3. Titus 3. You know, a little bit of insight into my life. I get a lot of questions about how to respond to the world in which we live. It's pretty unusual, if not very very rare, extraordinarily rare for people to ask me how can I contribute to the unity of the church, how can I be a constructive part of building the unity of the church. Well, in Titus 3, again you see this great emphasis on the nature of salvation. In chapter 3, verse 4, the Apostle Paul says, "when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Wow. So much great truth packed into such a condensed place for us to read and to understand what the emphasis of biblical salvation is. You are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone, not on anything that you have done.

Now where does Paul go having said these things? Skipping down to verse 9, he says, leading straight out of that wonderful truth, he goes to the matter of unity. He says in verse 9, "avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless." This is a waste of time. Don't go there. So much so that immediately after having laid down those doctrines of grace again, Paul says when you have someone that is injecting strife and disharmony into a body, there's something that you are to do with them, you're to warn them and then you're to put them out. Verse 10, "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned."

So we have Christ speaking in his high priestly prayer about the essence of unity. You see in a positive manner in Ephesians this call to unity that flows out of the teaching, true teaching of salvation and biblical salvation, and then here you get a negative example or a negative prohibition or a negative protection that is said, is that when there is division in the church, you are to deal with it and to protect the body so that there is no one that is given room and given liberty to disrupt that unity that God places such a preeminent priority upon.

Now the point that I'm making here is simply about the scriptural emphasis on the unity of the church, and that gives us a perspective and helps us to see a broader biblical context of what we are looking at here in the book of Philippians. Go back there with me as we have this broader biblical context to inform the context of the book of Philippians. Philippians 1:27 Paul said, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of

Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Conduct yourselves in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. That's the command.

Now what does that mean? He doesn't leave us to sort out and to make up our own ideas about what's worthy of the gospel of Christ, he tells us, he gets specific in the passage that follows. He says in chapter 2, verse 1, "if there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, any affection and compassion," well, "make my joy complete by," what? By unity, "by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." So this emphasis on unity we see in the Bible once again. Four times and there are others that I could have pointed to, but four times easily pointed out to you, you see God's emphasis, God's priority on the unity of God's people.

Now we're making this emphasis because it's what is at stake in the text that's in front of us but also just to give you a sense of where priorities ought to be. Scripture does not lead us into a morbid preoccupation with the passing politics of men. It leads us into eternal principles of the gospel of Christ and the outworking of that is found in the unity of God's people. You know, if we're going to try to establish a biblical mind and live a biblical life, then somewhere in our thinking the gathering, the fellowship, and the unity of God's people is going to need to be preeminent in our thinking, and I say without fear of any contradiction whatsoever, there are very very few people with any kind of public platform that are emphasizing this to the people of God today. And just in the timing and providence of God, we have the opportunity to bring ourselves back to what God considers important and what is of eternal consequence. It's so very important for us to understand this.

Now I believe, as far as I know and I take great great comfort from the fact that I believe that Truth Community Church itself is generally a unified body. I'm not aware of any deep fissures, deep conflicts, or deep divisions over things but, beloved, we must always be on perpetual guard for these things, perpetual guard for the unity of Christ. We all, not just the pastor, not just the elders, but every one of you that identify with this church, it is imperative and so vital for you to be a soldier on the front line looking to guard and protect that in light of what God has revealed in his word and what he has graciously given to us as a body because it is something that, in one sense, is fragile, it's easily lost, and it only takes one fly to stink up a whole bunch of ointment. And so we need to be careful in terms of what we are speaking, that what we speak and what we emphasize produces not anger or anxiety in others but contributes to this unity, and that when we see someone speaking or doing things that have a way of undermining that, you need to be on the front line of saying, "Friend, look, let's not go there. This is inconsistent. This would be divisive in the body. Let's not go there. I'm asking you to not say those things and to reconsider the import of what you are saying because Scripture places an emphasis on unity and we need to protect it within our body as well." And so these things are just of great consequence.

Now for today's text, after that bit of introduction, let me show you that this is what happens yet again. This is such a pattern in the writings of the Apostle Paul for these things. And you know, even if you're not trying to inject disunity, understand that if you are conscious of walking about with an angry spirit, angry over the things that are happening in the world or dissatisfied profoundly in life, that that's coming out, that that's spilling out of your life and it's going to poison unity in your family and in the broader body of Christ, and so this is just something that we all need to deal with, that we all need to be on guard with, that we all need to be repenting of and seeking to put on this kind of loving, humble unity that Scripture points the people of God to.

Now by way of reminder in Philippians 3, Paul's been talking, once again, about the great doctrines of salvation. He talks about relying on the righteousness of Christ alone in verse 9. He talks about sanctification in verse 10. He talks about glorification in chapter 3, verse 11, and he says, "My whole life is dedicated toward pressing toward and growing in these things and teaching them to you as well." Verse 14, he says, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Verse 15, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect," or mature, let us all "have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you." And so Paul has been speaking, once again, of salvation, of justification, sanctification and glorification, and he ends the chapter on this glorious reminder of where our home is and where our hope is. Chapter 3, verse 20, where is your home as a Christian? Verse 20, "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." A home in heaven. A hope of the return of Christ. As we saw on Tuesday, it lifts you up into a heavenly realm to contemplate these things. It has a transforming effect on all of your affections just like a sweet incense or a sweet candle, the aroma of it fills the whole room, so these truths of salvation and the truth of our heavenly home and the truth of our heavenly hope, all of this flavors the way that we live and think about all of life, and this is to be the predominant thing in our affections.

So if there's any truth to what I said in my introduction, we would expect to see some kind of statement about unity flowing from that and, beloved, that's exactly what we find. It's a very practical, immediate problem that Paul turns to. He leaves heaven, as it were, to deal with conflict in the church. He makes a direct connection between the two. So let's look at the first three verses here just to refresh where we're at. He says, "Therefore." Same kind of connection. Based on what I have been saying in chapter 3, this is the consequence that we are to draw from it and this is what I want from you going forward, as he writes to the church at Philippi. He says,

1 Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown,
in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

Okay, great. What does standing firm look like in this situation? Verse 2, he gets immediately practical and deals with an immediate situation that was occurring in the church. He says,

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. 3 Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Beloved, there is absolutely no way that anyone thinking biblically about salvation could think that there is a direct line from the doctrines of salvation into a preoccupation with the passing politics of man today. That is not the biblical line of thought and we must shift over into biblical thinking if we are to survive and thrive and to honor God in the midst of the days in which we live.

So let's take a look at this passage a little more closely here. Paul, as he is speaking and as he introduces this transition and this pivot in his thinking, in chapter 4, verse 1, he is speaking to them with deep affection and making an appeal of profound love to them. You see it in the terms of endearment by which he addresses them, six of them in that one verse. Look at it with me. He says beloved; secondly, brethren; thirdly, I long to see you; fourthly, my joy; fifthly, my crown. He includes it, he ends where he began the verse, my beloved. "My beloved brethren, I long to see you. You're my joy and my crown. I love you deeply. And in light of these things that I've been saying to you, here's what I want you to do, here's where I want to lead you in your thinking and in your response." You see, the response of Christians to the doctrines of salvation and the truth of God's word, it's never simply a mental activity, there's a life application that follows, and you see Paul drawing this out for them to see. But beloved, there is a pattern here, there is a sequence. You understand, you focus on the doctrine and then the application comes. You don't skip over the doctrine to application, contrary to a lot of preaching that takes place. You must know the doctrine and let the doctrine shape your response. So Paul has said, "Therefore, in light of what I have said, as you remember your future hope, here's what I want you to do."

Now he calls them there in verse 1, he calls them his crown. The crown in that day was a wreath that was placed on the head of a victor like in a race. You win a race and your prize was the crown, the wreath that was placed on your head. What Paul is saying here to this church that loved him and that he loved, he said, "You are a visible token of the fruit of my ministry. You're my crown. I have a reward in you," he says to the church at Philippi. And so he's speaking to them with great affection, with great affirmation, but the fact that a church is doing well doesn't mean that it has arrived. It doesn't mean that there is not more to do. It doesn't mean that there is not other ways in which they need to excel and that's what Paul is calling out to them. He says, "I love you so much and yet there's this one thing that you need to focus on and you need to address."

And what is the effect of these heavenly realities? Well, look at it there in verse 1 with me, "my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown," there's something that follows as a result of this, "in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved." To stand firm harkens back to that foundational exhortation that he gave them in chapter 1, verse 27. He's tying it all together. He says, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel,"

and now he comes back to that theme, that idea. He says, "You've got to stand firm. You need to lay hold of these things and not let go. Take all of these things about Christ that I have been speaking to you, His righteousness, your growth in Christ, our future hope, our home in heaven, and our hope of Christ's return, take all of these things and park it there. Stand in these things. Talk about these things. Respond to these things. Take them all deeply to heart and let that be what is shaping your life and your thinking."

And then having said that "stand firm," he applies the broad exhortation to the specific problem at hand and what we see in today's text are two calls: you see a call to reconcile, and a call to rejoice. Let's look, first of all, at the call to reconcile. This dear church which was doing so well and had been such a joy to Paul even as he wrote, this dear church was suffering from disharmony that threatened to undo it all.

Look at verse 2 with me. He says, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." Now we don't know much about these women other than what's mentioned here. They were apparently two prominent women in the church and their personal conflict was starting to affect the rest of the entire body. You had two prominent people fighting with each other in a way that was common knowledge within the church and everything was being threatened to be undone by all of the good that had taken place in their midst, and so their personal conflict was a matter of apostolic concern.

Now notice how Paul handles it. It's very interesting and this is very informative for the way that pastoral care is to be done. It's what we are to develop even if you're not in leadership and have no aspirations for leadership. These are principles and a pattern that helps us in all of our relationships to understand that even when there is something to be corrected, that the correction takes place in the context of love. And so Paul, having just said all of those terms of endearment, "My joy, my crown, my beloved. Oh, I'm so grateful for you, but there's something that we need to do." And contrary to the false view of love, love still has room to bring correction and even rebuke to those who need it, and so love does not mean that conflict goes unaddressed, love does not mean that sin is allowed to just continue and to infect a body like cancer in a body. No, no, no, no. True love looks to preserve unity because that is such a high priority in the purpose of God.

And so Paul addresses them in the context of love and notice in verse 2 how he addresses them with such balance as well. Verse 2 he says this, he says, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." He repeats "I urge" to speak to them individually. It's as if he said, "Euodia, I urge you to live in harmony in the Lord." Oh, and without taking sides, "Syntyche, I urge you to live in harmony in the Lord." So he hasn't prioritized one over the other, he hasn't chosen sides here. He says, "You have this conflict. It's time to work it out. It's time to address this." And notice that the context is this, "Euodia and Syntyche, in light of everything that I've said in chapter 3," not that he had chapter divisions then, "but in light of the righteousness of Christ, in light of our hope, in light of our heavenly home, you have to deal with this and resolve it."

The preeminence of our salvation, the preeminence of Christ, the preeminence of heaven has a direct effect on the way that we live within the body of Christ. This is what he's

bringing out to them and when he says "to live in harmony," you may have a marginal note that has the idea of being of the same mind, the idea is thinking the same thing. What he's telling them is this, he's saying, "You two need to find a common mind on these matters. Whatever the conflict is, you need to work it out and you need to set aside any personal animosity that's developed in your relationship and realize that in light of these greater heavenly realities, in light of this preeminent priority on unity," that even Paul himself had been talking about in chapter 2, "this can't go on like this. You have to deal with this and resolve it."

And so they needed, here's the thing and this is, it's a great time for us to be talking about these things. It's much easier and it's much better to talk about such themes as this before a problem is evident than to try to come to it when the problem has already taken root. They needed to put the interest of Christ ahead of their personal conflict. They needed to put the body ahead of their individual interests. There is a subordination of our thoughts and our interest to Christ that leads to unity. There is a subordination of our personal interest to the greater whole, to the greater body that influences the way that we deal with personal conflict with one another in the body of Christ, and the true Christian embraces that. The true Christian understands that, understands that my deal is not the ultimate purpose, it's not the ultimate reality. The ultimate purpose is the glory of God and according to Scripture, the glory of God is manifested in the unity of the church, and therefore if you are at conflict with someone else in the body, it is incumbent upon you to find a way to live in harmony with them, consistent with the fact that each of you are sinners who needed redemption in Christ, and Christ having given you redemption, having given you what you needed in your individual soul, now calls you to find unity with each other in the midst of those things.

And Christ himself was the appeal for unity, verses 5 through 8 of chapter 2. Let's look at it there, how he humbled himself, how he put the interest of his people ahead of his own well-being. He says in verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men." And Christ, my friends here today, Christ who was perfectly righteous, who had done no wrong, even though he was perfectly in the right in everything about himself and his interactions with others, he was perfectly in the right, what did he do? He humbled himself and gave himself over to take the blame for our sins at the cross. Verse 8, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." He laid aside his interests, he laid aside his claims for the sake of the people of God.

Now my friends, if you are a Christian, I speak optimistically but it is a conditional statement, if you are a Christian, you are to have the mind of Christ, and if you are to have the mind of Christ, there is going to be a certain element of self-sacrifice in your life where sometimes you lay aside your right, so-called, you lay aside the fact that maybe you had the preeminent, you were comparatively in the right in a situation, you're willing to lay that aside if need be to restore harmony. And it's mutual, it's not a one-sided thing, this is the mind that we're all to have. Paul speaks to both sides of the conflict and says,

"You need to live in harmony in the Lord. Find a common mind on the thing." And so what the real conflict was in the time 2,000 years ago doesn't really matter. It certainly doesn't affect us today. None of us here in this room are concerned with what those two women were actually upset with one another about. It's not important to us. That conflict was forgotten millennia ago but the enduring principle of what they were to do, that is alive and active in the church today, seeking to live in harmony in the Lord.

Now Paul goes on in verse 3 and he says this, he says, "Indeed, true companion," that's how they've chosen to translate a single word. The underlying Greek term might be a proper name, you know, a name that then was understood as a proper name and now is being taken in a different sense. That's possible. This passage is full of personal references, but whatever the case may be about that, he says, "Indeed, true companion," he's speaking perhaps to a leader in the church at this point. He says, "I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." He's calling upon this man to help these ladies as a partner. These women needed help. They needed someone to mediate the conflict. They needed someone that could, as it were, in love, put, speaking figuratively, one hand on the shoulder of one and one hand on the shoulder of the other and to help bring them together, to encourage them, to mediate, to soften the conflict.

The idea of the passage here is take hold of these ladies and lift them up. Help them get beyond this. And sometimes that's what we need. Sometimes there's conflict in marriage and we need someone to come alongside us and help us get over the hump in a communication issue. There's no shame in that. Sometimes an elder needs to help, you know, a couple of people in the church to think differently, to find a way of resolution. There's no shame in that, that's part of life in the body and there's far greater shame, there's far greater shame and even sin in preserving the conflict, in refusing help than there is of simply asking for the help that you need in order to get beyond it.

You know, I can remember a time many many years ago, I had a conflict, a bit of a business conflict with a man in a church, not here, back in California. We had a conflict and we could not work it out. He was entrenched that he was right at the time, and I was entrenched in what I knew was right, you know? That's part of the problem. That's always part of the problem. "I know you think you're right but I am right." You know how that goes. That's not going anywhere. Well, you know, there were a couple of loving elders that got involved and listened to what each of us had to say and they found a way to reach a resolution, you know, that involved some compromise on both sides, said, "This is what we want you to do." And you know, to the great credit of the man that I had the conflict with, he came over to my house, he brought what the elders wanted him to do and I had given what the elders wanted me to do, and we shook hands and later on he asked me to serve in ministry with him in a different realm, in a different place. Look, I take no credit for that because my attitude was a big part of the problem, looking back on it. My selfishness, you know, my insistence on getting my way was really at the center of a lot of it. And the elders came along and helped us find harmony in the Lord. That other man came alongside and he humbly agreed to what was said and we found harmony, and if he

walked through that door today, we would embrace each other. But that wouldn't have happened without the help and intervention of godly elders at the time who helped us find our way through the conflict.

Conflict doesn't have to lead to division. Churches do not have to split because a couple of people are at odds with one another. And if collectively, corporately, we understand the priority that God places on unity, that we have an individual responsibility to live in harmony in the Lord, and if we're responsive to the help of those that God has put in our lives, there's a lot of ways to go forward in a way that honors Christ, that honors his emphasis on unity, and preserves the harmony of an entire body of believers. And the question that I have, most of you are, you know, associated with our church, you consider this to be your church home, my question to you is whether you will embrace that and live that way, lay aside your pet peeves, lay aside your perspectives on things that are not biblical, that create division, to subordinate those to this greater priority of unity in the church.

Now Paul, as those elders in my prior church did for me many many years ago, Paul, and this is just so sweet and you see how reconciliation works in the body of Christ and how it is fostered by those that are involved. Paul, even as he is correcting these women and telling them to get it straightened out, he's doing it in a spirit of love and affirmation. He says there in verse 3, look at how he describes them. He says, "I ask you also to help these women who," he now gives a relative clause to describe who these women are and what they have done. He says, "These women have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel." They have worked alongside me. They have helped me in my ministry and I appreciate them for it and the rest of my fellow workers. They have helped me in the past. That's why it's so important that they be restored and reconciled. And not only based on what they have done in the past, these are women," look at the end of verse 3, "their names are in the book of life." These are Christians. They are going to heaven. They have shared in the work of the gospel. It's so important for this, for all of that, for the sake of the past and for the sake of the future that this present conflict be resolved and this be reclaimed for the gospel of Christ. "They have shared in my struggle. They have been strategic in ministry. They share in the same Christ and in the same salvation and the same hope in heaven that I do," he says. And so there's all kinds of reasons to resolve these things. This is the emphasis of Scripture. This is the example of Christ. This flows naturally from our home and hope. They have ministered in the past. They're going to heaven in the future. All of these things, all of this context puts the personal conflict in its place, shows it for its minor importance in the big scheme of things and therefore by developing a common mind in every party involved, it gives the perspective by which these things can be addressed, laid aside, resolved and being able to move forward. And this is how reconciliation occurs in the church, occurs in a family, and it's how unity is preserved in a local body.

You know, if you're familiar with the teaching of our church over a long period of time, you know that we've talked about unity in the church on many many occasions, and it's a priority here. If the elders become aware of conflict, you know, we're jumping on that with hazmat suits and putting it out, you know, so to speak. You know, it's kind of a poor

analogy there. We're going to treat it like it's something radioactive and do everything that we can to put the fire out before it has time to spread. And those of you that are considering membership in our church, we've got a ton of people, it's very exciting, a ton of people signed up for our membership class on January 31, those of you that are members here, it's just important for us to refresh our mind and refresh our understanding about a priority here. You get what you teach for a lot of the time, and we have a unified body because we understand that this is a priority to Christ, and for those that look to come in, we just ask you to recognize this biblical priority and commit to it if you want to be a part of our body. We love that. We embrace you. We want you to do that but it has to be with a sense that, "I understand that coming into this, that there is something more important than me here. The body, my individual concerns are always subordinate to the greater needs of the body." And that's what fosters unity. That's how we're able to live together in harmony despite our diversity of opinions on different things.

So we look past the conflict to eternal spiritual realities and our common identity in Christ should foster resolution and peace. Proverbs 17:14 says this and you can jot this down, you don't need to turn there, but this is the mindset that we should all have in our families, in the church, in other areas of life where we're dealing with other believers. "The beginning of strife is like letting out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out. The beginning of strife is like letter out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out." This is the teaching of Scripture and Paul shows us a pattern by which to honor this call to reconcile.

Then he immediately pivots and goes to our second point this morning in this call to rejoice. This call to rejoice in verses 4 and 5, he tells them to put off the disunity and to put on joy in their hearts. Look at verses 4 and 5 with me. He says,

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Now notice that this command to rejoice is something that he has already said earlier. In chapter 3, verse 1, he says, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." He comes back to that theme in verse 4 of chapter 4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" It is a comprehensive call to joy.

This idea of rejoicing, it's about a mental outlook, a spiritual outlook, you could say, that is confident in the ultimate well-being of the people of God. If you are a Christian, there should be a prevailing sense deep in your heart that it is going to be well with my soul because Christ loves me, Christ redeemed me, Christ will keep me, Christ will bring me home, and that shapes the way that you view all of life. And in every circumstance whether it's social, political, medical, relational, whatever it is that tends to undermine us and throw us off track, in every circumstance we come back to this fear of being in the Lord that defines the way that we view everything else in life. The lexicons that help us understand the original terms give the sense of "be happy, be glad, be delighted in the Lord," and he repeats it for emphasis. Look at it there in verse 4, "Rejoice in the Lord

always; again I will say, rejoice! In case you missed it the first time," Paul says, "I will immediately repeat myself. I am calling you to rejoice in the Lord."

Now it is not a matter of slight significance that he says rejoice in the Lord. Our gladness is in Christ, who he is and what he has done for us, not in the circumstances of life. If Paul's testimony in chapter 3 is your testimony as well, that, you know, "I've forsaken self-righteousness and I trust in the righteousness of Christ alone for my harmony with God. I am," you say to yourself, "I'm pressing on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. I am eagerly waiting for my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to appear from heaven and to transform my body into conformity with the body of His glory." That's what it means to be in the Lord in the context of what Paul is saying. You know, it's the whole realm of understanding where your reconciliation with God is found; understanding that Christ is received by faith, not given to you by works; understanding that the love of God has been placed upon you, the love of God will keep you. And in the language of chapter 1, verse 6, "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." That's what it means to be in the Lord, is all of those truths of salvation, you meditate upon them, you digest them in your heart, you come back to them again and again and again and they become the defining way that you view all of the world and everything that happens within it so that there is nothing in your life, in any of those realms, that you view apart from Christ and what he has done for you, and the promise of Scripture is that those who cultivate that mindset and it's something you develop over time, you do it repeatedly again and again and again, you come back to these things and you rehearse them in your mind again and again and again.

Did I say you should do it repeatedly? Well, you know, that's what Paul said, "Again. I'll say it again. I'll stir you up by way of reminder," Peter says. And that understanding of our reconciliation with God, that understanding of who we have in Christ is what provides us with a foundation for settled delight in the Lord. And it applies in all of life's conditions, not just the favorable ones. Anybody, I like to say these things to you, beloved, anybody can be contented when all of the circumstances are going the way that they want and their favored person is in power. Anybody can have a superficial contentment like that. It's when adversity comes that these things are tested. It's when adversity comes that we most need the admonition of this passage.

So he goes on in verse 5, he says, "Let your gentle spirit be known to all men." A gentle spirit an, oh, my goodness, do we need this in the day in which we live, do we need what I'm about to say, what Scripture points us to in the day and age in which we live. So much anger around us. So much anxiety in the body of Christ. People agitated over shadowy conspiracy theories and stirring each other up over these kinds of things. Beloved, nothing about any of that, the anger, the anxiety, the agitation, nothing about any of that can fit within the context of the passage that the Lord's brought to our mind here today. None of it. None of it, beloved, and we need the word of God to shape our thinking and this is a command, this is a command from God, "Let your gentle spirit be known to all men." This is God commands us to live this way. This is the way Christians are to be. This is who we are to be. And the word "always" from verse 4 gives it a universal and a timeless dimension.

Now this gentle spirit of which Paul speaks, it refers to a peaceable kindness in relationships. It includes the idea of having a patience that rises above personal offenses. There is a willingness to listen and a refusal to retaliate that allows and undergirds the whole harmony and the whole unity of which Scripture has pointed us to today that enables all of that to happen. It begins with an attitude deep in your heart that is independent of and transcendent of personal or political circumstances.

Now look, remember who's writing this, it's the Apostle Paul. Paul himself was living this as he wrote. He was unjustly in prison. He was under the authority of a demented Caesar named Nero whose conduct and attitudes were only going to get worse in the immediate years that follow. He was under a hostile government and unjustly imprisoned and none of his rights were being honored and protected in the place that he was, except for the fact that he was going to get to appeal it to Caesar. Everything about his personal circumstances were embedded in what was humanly unjust, and which he certainly did not deserve in a manner that echoed the righteousness of Christ and the fact that Christ was unjustly treated by human terms when he was crucified at the cross. He had done no unrighteousness. There was no sin on his lips. He asked his hostile adversaries, he said, "Which one of you convicts Me of any sin?" And they had no answer. They had nothing to point to and yet he suffered unjustly. Paul suffering unjustly, imprisoned unjustly under false accusations. This is the man, these are the circumstances under which he tells us to let our gentle spirit be known to all men. He tells us to live in harmony. He tells us to find our satisfaction in Christ and in Christ alone.

Now look, I said on Tuesday for 80 minutes worth of stuff, and part of what I said there was I feel like in this time in our lives and ministry, I'm fighting for the future of Christianity here and what it's going to mean. Paul is showing us what the essence of Christianity is. He says, "This is what it's to be like always. Gentile spirit. Peaceable." One writer said this and I quote, he says, "The immediate outward expression of a rejoicing heart is Christ-like gentleness toward all people. It necessarily involves the patient bearing of abuse." You see Scripture, you see Paul here calling us for a settled contentment in Christ. I have Christ. That means that the fundamental perspective and dimension of my life is contentedness because if I am his and he is mine, then I have everything that I need for all of eternity and that shapes the way that I view everything else in life, and it shades me, it protects me from undue anger, undue agitation, undue anxiety, to realize who I am in Christ and what I have in him.

Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5, "Rejoice always." This is a repeated theme of Scripture, beloved. And look, I know for some of us it's convicting to hear these things, for some of us we need to reorder priorities and as you get older, that's not easy to do, but in Christ you can, by the help of the Spirit you can, by the testimony of Scripture you should and you must if you claim to be in Christ. This is the perspective by which we view the world and I'm just so anguished, I'm so anguished as I see things that people say online and in other kinds of communication that just shows that there's no perspective of this informing what they are saying and how they are responding in any way whatsoever. It's time for us to change. It's time for us to live like Christians as Scripture tells us to do.

How can we do that? What's our confidence in that? Well, look at the end of verse 5 as we come to a close here. "Let your gentle spirit be known to all men." And here is the confidence that enables you to do that, "The Lord is near." The Lord is near. It's possible that Paul was thinking of the imminent return of Christ. He had just been talking in chapter 3, verse 20 about the return of Christ and the idea that Christ is coming soon and we draw our confidence from that, that's certainly part of it. But I think more likely he has in mind this, he means that this lovely Lord Jesus Christ is near to his people. He is with us. He said at the end of Matthew, "Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age." David said in Psalm 23, he said, "I fear no evil for You are with me." And beloved, beloved, I know, I know that most of you would say that you believe that, you know, and I could read Psalm 23 in any context and you would nod your head vigorously and, "Yes, amen. I believe that. The Lord is near me. I fear no evil. Amen. Hallelujah." And it's not that I think that you don't really believe it, it's just that I'm pointing out if that is true, if the Lord is with us, the Lord is near us, then he is with us and near us in the middle of the immediate circumstances that we're facing today. And if he is, then there is no cause for fear. There is absolutely no justification for carnal anger, carnal anxiety, and carnal agitation. If this is true, then it changes the way that we look at everything else.

May the Spirit of God help us grasp that. The presence of Christ is our comfort. It is our confidence. His promise is what strengthens us. And if, look, let me approach it from this angle, if what I'm saying isn't true, if Scripture is not accurate on these matters, then, look, we're really wasting our time here. There is no reason for us to be here if this isn't true. We might as well just go out and join all of the agitation that's taking place because we have nothing else to live for, our faith is in vain just as much as if Christ had never been resurrected from the dead. It's that what you want? It's that the practical pragmatic philosophy by which you want to live and you're going to live? Or are you going to look at God's word, are you going to look up at Christ, are you going to remember what the Lord has done in your life and your soul and your heart and say, "Yes, I know this is true. The Lord is with me. The Lord is near me. The Lord is actively at work in everything that happens. Christ is righteous. He has redeemed me from my sin and He is returning, and one day I am going to be like Him."

If you believe that and Christ is yours, then it means that you come to the same conclusion that was found in Psalm 23 at the end. Look at it there with me. Psalm 23, we'll close with this. Take everything that's on the table in our world and in your personal life, grant that Christ is with you if you have repented of sin and received him by faith. If that's true, then there is only one possible outcome for your life, there is only one possible way that things can unfold for you no matter what else happens in the world. Verse 6, Psalm 23, "Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Are you a Christian? Then this is the outcome for you and it means that you live and let your gentle spirit be known, you live in joy that is rooted in a confidence in Christ that cannot be shaken. Your union with Christ promotes unity in the body. Your union with Christ promotes joy in your heart. I invite you to do something with that.

Let's pray.

Father, we bless Your name. Help us to live in unity and to live in joy in keeping with the wonderful reality of our salvation and the infallible, unshakable promises of Your holy word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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