

Christ-Centred Peace

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Philippians chapter 4 verse 1 to 9. Please follow along on the screen or on your Bible.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

I entreat you, O dear, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything. But in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[1 : 21] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable.

If there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and sent in me, practice these things.

And the God of peace will be with you. Amen. Thank you so much, Iris. It's great to see all of you virtually.

At the moment, we would love to be back together physically. But as you're online and in your home, wherever you are, I'd love you just to pray right now for God's word to really engage in our hearts.

So let's bow your heads and pray. Father, just thank you that you are an incredible God. That you're the God of all the universe. And yet you're the God who wants to be with us and to bring us peace.

[2 : 45] I pray, Lord, right now, Lord, many of us are in totally different circumstances. Some of us feel very stressed. Some of us feel worried. Some of us feel all over the place. But, Lord, we pray right now you'd center our hearts on you.

That your word would get into the depths of our souls and would bring joy this morning. Joy in you. So I pray, Lord, take your word. Take away my words and let you speak through what we say this morning.

For the name and the glory of Jesus. Amen. Great. If you don't know me, my name is Chris. I'm one of the leaders here today. And we've been looking at this series in Philippians over the last few weeks.

Now, for me, I've been in Hong Kong for nine years. And Hong Kong is one of the most incredible cities in the world. It is beautiful in scenery.

It's modern. It's efficient. It's an extraordinary city. But if there's any word that I would say doesn't describe Hong Kong, it would be the word peace.

[3 : 51] And maybe also the word joy. Because, you see, in Hong Kong, we're a hurried, anxious, stressed people. And there's also so much division and conflict that has been taking place particularly over the last year or so.

And so this passage is, we're going to look at with Paul writing to a pressured, anxious people. And he's going to take them through in the first two to three verses.

He's going to look at dealing with some relational, bringing relational peace to people. And then he makes a promise. In verse 7, he says, the peace of God will be with you.

And then he says in verse 9, the God of peace will be with you. This passage is a promise of peace.

Not just to the Philippians, but to us, right where we are, right today, whatever circumstances you're in. God wants us, as his people, to be a people who love and walk in peace, no matter what our circumstances are.

[4 : 57] So, the question we're going to look at is, how do we get to be a people of peace this morning? Well, maybe let's just first start thinking about what actually is peace in the Bible.

Well, let me tell you what it isn't. It isn't just being chilled out and having a laid-back personality. Because often people who are very laid-back can struggle to really care about the real realities of life.

They just want to chill. Whereas, it's also not just going on a staycation without your kids. Because when you come back from staycation, the stress just comes again.

You see, biblical peace is actually upward, inward, and outward. In the upward, the gospel promise here, you notice it says, the peace of God will be with you.

But it's only experienced when you have the God of peace who is with you. In other words, Romans 5 says this, therefore, since we've been justified by faith, we have peace with God.

[6 : 01] This first peace is a God peace because of Jesus' death on the cross. We are no longer his enemies, but we're reconciled in relationship with him. We're his.

And that peace with God then leads to the inward peace. A calm, confident trust in God where in your soul, it doesn't matter if the storms of life are going crazy, you know that God has got you. You know that you're his. You know he'll provide. You know that he is the one who anchors and holds you. And he says it surpasses understanding this peace because it's not what goes on in your brain that you're planning to try and fix your circumstances that's going to get it.

It's a peace which has gone from here and it's gone down deep into here. You see, you need upward peace to get inward peace, but then that leads to outward peace.

You see, that's relational peace with others. You don't have to prove yourself or fight to win in the argument because the peace of God leads us, and our reconciliation with God leads us to seek to reconcile with others and to lay down our rights and our interests.

[7 : 22] You see, Paul says here that the peace of God, upward, inward, outward, will guard your hearts and minds and minds in Christ.

That word guard, it's the word which means to act like a security guard. You know, I don't know if you remember, back in 9-11, just after 9-11, I went to Los Angeles airport.

And the security there was just insane. It was, you could hardly move one meter without someone asking for your ID, trying to get past it. It was just almost impossible to get through.

And Paul is saying, in your heart and in your heart and in your mind, the peace of God is meant to be like security guards guarding your heart to keep it trusting in Christ.

You see, you hear you're getting fired and worry comes along saying, oh, what about the future? And the peace of God says, let me see your ID, worry. You see all your friends are getting married and you're still single and fear of missing out comes to you and says, you should worry now.

[8 : 33] But the peace of God says, no entry, FOMO. You've been hurt. Resentment and bitterness are eating away at heart.

They're trying to get into your heart and the peace of God says, access denied. That's what peace is. Peace is like a ballast. A ballast is what? It's the heavy weight you put in a boat which no matter whether the waves are pounding away, it keeps that boat rock solid and steady.

It's not going to capsize. That's what the peace of God wants to do in us as a community. Do you want that kind of peace in your heart and in your relationships?

Well, Paul is going to show us how do we get to take hold of that peace. So if we remember over the last three chapters in the book of Philippians, Paul has been writing to anxious, in anxious, troubling times.

Paul's in prison because of the gospel and he's awaiting trial and possible execution. The Philippian church have been under pressure from outside and there are relational tensions inside the church.

[9 : 47] Paul has told the Philippians, guys, we're on the same team. We're united with our minds set on Christ, putting him and others' interests before our own. We're going to follow and imitate the J-curve where the way down is the way to life.

The way of dying to self is the way to resurrection power. We put our hope and our minds on knowing Christ, heading towards that goal. It's been inspirational stuff.

It's been a great sermon Paul has been preaching and you'd have thought that would be enough for the Philippians to go, great, we've got peace now. But Paul says, no, gospel preaching, even reading scripture or spiritual disciplines, though they are vital in the Christian life, Paul says, first of all, that if we're to be a people marinated in peace, we've got to take hold of the first path of peace which is, we need to walk that path together.

This is verse 2 and 3. For Ahir, he gets specific and he names Euodia and Syntyche, two women who aren't getting on with each other.

And we don't know exactly why, but it seems to be not a major sin issue because he doesn't rebuke them, but it seems to be a preference issue.

[11:02] Like, I like hymns, she likes rock music, we don't get on. But why does he name Euodia and Syntyche? And entreat them, urge them.

You see, what he's saying is, this kind of conflict in the church is an issue. He's saying, don't let conflict just fester like an open wound.

It says, it may not feel like it's a massive deal for these two women not to be talking to each other, but there is a lack of peace here. And so he says, agree in the Lord, which doesn't mean have all the same opinions, but it means live in a harmony in Christ.

Make Jesus and his honour and the gospel and your mission together more important than being right or getting your own way. Because you're on the same team and your fighting is like trying to punch yourself in the face.

It harms you and it harms the gospel. But then he says, okay, let's deal with this. But then he says, true companion, help these women.

[12:11] And we don't know exactly who this true companion is. Some people think it's Luke. But what he's saying is, you're not just going to do this by yourselves. You know, I can tell you we need community to help us in our relationships and to have peace internally as well.

I can't tell you how many marriages, how many family relationships, how many CGs and churches are divided and have issues and flounder because we've either brushed conflict under the carpet and tried to avoid talking about it or because we're so independent and private and fearful of what others will think about us that we haven't invited anybody in to help us on the journey to peace together.

You see, privacy kills peace because it leaves you wrestling with your issues in isolation without other mature believers that God has placed there to help you walk on that path towards peace.

So let me encourage you. I don't know where you're up to but if you are going through any either relational issues or just anxiousness in your own soul right now, don't walk it alone.

Talk to a member of your CG. Come and talk to a member of staff or an elder. We want to walk it together because the way of peace is a communal journey. That's the first thing.

[13:40] The first path to peace is walk together. Second path to peace is this in verse 4. He says, Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I'll say it. Rejoice. Did you get what he said there? He said, In the midst of all the challenges, everything you're facing right now, rejoice in the Lord always.

In Greek, the word always means always. And you just received a harsh text from your boss. Rejoice.

Your spouse just left the towel on the floor for the thousandth time. Rejoice. Your economy is collapsing. Your work is on the line. You're fearful about the future of politics.

Rejoice. And inside, aren't we going, Paul, what planet are you on? Could you just get a little bit of a reality check here?

[14:40] And Paul anticipates our kind of natural objection in our heart and he goes, No, no, no.

Did you hear what I said? No, let me say it again to you if you're wondering. Rejoice. Rejoice. You see, this is not a suggestion.

This is a command. And with commands, you're not meant to go, Oh, that sounds a little bit difficult. Maybe I'll just give that one a miss. No, commands, you're meant to obey them.

Commands are not optional. And so Jesus, what he's saying is, Jesus calls every Christian to a life of joy. It's one of the chief markers of the Christian life.

It's the pathway to peace. Romans 14 says, Paul goes, The kingdom of God is not about external things like eating and drinking. It's a matter of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

This is what it's about. You see, what is joy really, what is he talking about here? Well, what he's not talking about is going around with a fake smile on your face, pretending that everything's fine when everything else is collapsing around you.

[15 : 56] You know, we should feel sorrow when we lose a loved one or when there is pain and difficulty in circumstances. We should feel grief when Liverpool lose in the Champions League.

That is right and appropriate. But, some people are thinking that's joy, but we need to correct that. But so often, you know, and I've experienced this, many Christians, when you're feeling down, when you're feeling miserable, I've had so many come to me and say, I don't really want to go to church and engage with community because I think I'm just going to be a hypocrite singing songs and those kind of things.

Because we're supposed to be happy, right, as Christians. But the thing is, we've got the total wrong idea of what joy is meant to be about here. In 2 Corinthians, Paul can say, I'm sorrowful, but I'm always rejoicing.

You see, you can have sorrow and joy at the same time. Christians should be the most real people in the world, not denying our feelings. But what is joy?

If that's what it's not, what is it? Well, the most simple thing we can say is, joy is a feeling or a state of happiness. In scripture, you can feel joy because of a good meal, seeing friends again like Epaphroditus.

[17 : 17] You can even feel joy, rejoice, getting your own way. The Pharisees rejoiced when Judas betrayed Jesus. So you don't even need to be a Christian to rejoice.

But there is something unique about Christian, biblical joy, joy, which is it's not determined by your circumstances. You know, you can rejoice when you're in prison like Paul or when you've just been beaten like the apostles in Acts 5.

It's a Christian joy. It's not primarily joy in circumstances, it's joy in Jesus. And so that means there's two things that joy is, and rejoicing.

Joy is both a gift and a fight. It is both a fruit of the spirit and a choice of focus. So let me think of the first one.

Why is it a gift? Have you ever tried to command a feeling? Okay, you've just heard you failed an exam.

[18 : 24] Now be happy! Okay? It doesn't work right. You can't just switch on and off your emotions. That's why this kind of rejoicing is a fruit of the spirit because it is the Holy Spirit opening your eyes to see the beauty of Jesus right where you are.

You see, I've just talked to a couple people even in this past week who are going through really difficult work circumstances. And both of them have said to me, you know, everyone around me I talk to thinks I should be really worried and really stressed because this is just a tough situation but I feel like this sense of just real peace and real joy at the moment in God because I just see God is good at the moment and he's going to provide for me and everyone's looking at me like how can you do that?

And the reason they can do that is because it's a work of the spirit in their lives. It's a gift from God. But the Paul actually he says, you know, I want to know the resurrection power of Jesus and resurrection power is the power to rejoice no matter what's going on in your life because of Jesus. That's why we need to pray for joy in Jesus. I don't know when the last time you actually prayed that you would actually learn how to rejoice in Jesus in your circumstances. I'm just challenged by that. But we desperately need the spirit's work. Doesn't our automatic response to that command of thinking that's just not realistic. Show that we're so self-reliant in our lives that we think it all depends on us.

[20 : 03] No, we've got to get desperate for our eyes to be focused on him and to have the spirit bring us joy in our hearts. But it's a gift but it's not just a gift.

It's also a fight for focus. You see, he says rejoice in the Lord. Not rejoice because your circumstances suck.

He says rejoice in the Lord because Paul has just got this active focus on Jesus all the time. We've seen it all before. Chapter 1, he says for me to live is Christ and me to die is gain.

Chapter 3, I've counted everything a loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus, my Lord. In his struggles, what he's doing, he's actually not looking down, and he's looking up and he's seeing Jesus and he's saying, I can see him and his grace in the midst of this.

You see where his focus is? He's fighting to fix his eyes on Jesus. You know, part of the fight of joy is when you are feeling miserable, when you are feeling stressed and down, it's not backing out of community because you feel like a hypocrite.

[21 : 14] It's actually moving into God's people. It's getting into God's word. It's fixing, it's choosing to fix our thoughts on Jesus and say, I'm going to trust him even though I don't feel like it.

It's a fight. It's putting on Jesus-centered worship music when you just feel like you've got no energy left to fight, just to help lift your eyes up to him. It's pouring out your emotions to God and trusting him and lifting him with an expectancy that the spirit will restore joy and peace into your heart in his timing.

And you're going to come back again and again and that's the fight. That's the fight for joy. Some Christians think joy should just be this kind of automatic thing. They think it's just gift but no fight. But God says, no, it needs both of those things together. So what do we fight with? How do we fight? What are we rejoicing?

Well, here's what we need to do. We need to get out our gospel shotgun. And we need to fire the promises of God in our circumstances. Here's what we rejoice in. First, we rejoice in grace.

[22 : 26] Philippians 3, 20 says, our citizenship is in heaven. So we rejoice in whose we are. You know, our citizenship is in heaven.

You could have just been treated really unfairly at work and you're feeling miserable, angry, frustrated. Peace is gone. But when you remember, Jesus died for me when I never deserved it. He's treated me so much better than I deserve. In Christ, they can mistreat me but I have a savior who loves me, who holds me. I'm safe, I'm held, I'm secure.

No one can ever take away what I have in Jesus. We can rejoice. We rejoice in grace. We rejoice in power. You wake up and you feel like you've got just to face a whole load of people or situations you just don't know how to face or you just don't want to.

Anyone ever like that? Pull that gospel trigger which says, I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. His resurrection power is at work in me right now.

[23 : 34] He's the Lord and he has this situation in his hands. He's changing me by his spirit so I can be more than a conqueror today through him. Jesus, let's go together and face this.

I rejoice in power. I rejoice in grace. We rejoice in hope. You failed again. You feel the shame and stress of just constantly messing up or you're waiting.

You're seeing other people's mess ups and you're waiting. You're longing for them to change. 32021 says, we await a savior, Jesus.

Who will transform our lowly body into his, to be like his glorious body. You say, shame, I'm not going to live under you any longer. I have a savior who is bigger, who is more glorious, who loves me.

His love is deeper. His power is greater than any failure. And he can work right now in my life and in the life of the people around me because he's going to take today, he's going to transform it for his glory because he is near, he's coming back again and he's going to do a restoration work and he's going to work even right now for his, for redemptive glory.

[24 : 51] We can rejoice in grace, in power, in hope. this ain't all there is. Our savior is returning. The Lord is near.

And as we learn how to fight in that and pray for the spirit to work in our life, Jesus becomes more precious to us. The word of God, the spirit takes his word and just warms your heart. some of us don't experience that joy or that peace that joy is like a playmate with because our focus is so cluttered on so many other things.

Our minds are so focused on our own plans that we often count following Christ as loss compared to the surpassing worth of everything else we want in our lives.

but the path to the fortress of peace goes by the gateway of walking together and of rejoicing in Christ together.

[25 : 55] I want to just stop here and pause. We're going to come on to the last couple of points in a minute but I want you to stop and either with the person next to you or if you're on your own I've got a couple of questions that I want you just to reflect on to talk about together.

What gives you the greatest joy? Does that lead to peace in God? How are you fighting for joy and peace in Jesus right now in your present circumstances?

So take a couple of minutes and then we'll come back and we'll carry on with the next part. we'll see you once again. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Okay.

[28 : 47] So we've looked at the pathway to peace, that fortress, which means we don't walk alone. We do it together. We rejoice always in all circumstances.

But then thirdly, the passage says, pray thankfully. Here's what it says in verse six. Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God.

You see, the Philippians have got good reason to be anxious. Paul is in prison and potentially about to die, and they may even be next. They don't know.

Paul's not saying at this point, just be zen. You know, don't be concerned about anything. You see, if my 11-month-old son went missing for 24 hours and I was not concerned, that would be a lack of love.

The reason we get anxious and we worry is because we love things, because we care about things which seem to be under threat or out of our control.

[29 : 55] Whether it's our health, whether it's our kids, whether it's our love life, whether it's our job, whatever it is in our relationships. But Paul is saying when anxiety knocks on the door, if you want the security guards of God's peace-filled presence to be with you, stop clinging with clenched fists to what you care about most.

Just like my son with his favorite toy. Surrender them open-handedly to the feet of Jesus to entrust them to him in prayer and supplication.

And what he's saying is in prayer, and he's talking general prayer, that regular routine of opening your life up to relate to God, for him to come into all of your life.

That's time with God. If you don't spend time with God regularly in scripture, in seeking his face, to enjoy him, don't be surprised if you discover a restlessness in your own soul, because you've already fired the security guards of God's peace.

Worry and relational tension can just walk right in if you're not doing that regularly. But then he doesn't just say general prayer, he also says supplication and request. That's specific requests for help.

[31 : 17] And he says, in everything. That means not just spiritual stuff. It's in everything. Big stuff, little stuff, the things you think God might not even be concerned about.

You know, I remember it was late. I was walking back late night from Kowloon somewhere. And I was walking back and I was feeling tired. I was feeling miserable.

I was feeling hungry. But it was late night, so I didn't want to eat very much. I wanted just a snack. But if you know me, I have some food intolerances and snacks I can never find anywhere that I can eat. And that all just made me feel like, oh, a little pity party of how unfair life was at that moment. But then I stopped to say to myself, God, and I prayed, God, I know that you promised to provide for me. And God, I just give you this stupid little moment to you.

And I walked around the corner and there was a sushi shop. And sushi is one of the few snacks that I can eat. And I wasn't in an area where I thought there was any sushi around. It was so late. I thought everything was shut.

[32 : 21] And I rejoiced in the Lord at that moment. But that sushi shop was actually always there. It wasn't a miraculous event in one sense.

But I saw God in the ordinary everydayness, his gracious hand, because I had entrusted my care to him. And I saw, like, if I hadn't prayed, I would have just felt entitled.

And I would have just not even stopped for a second thought at that moment. But instead, thankfulness filled my heart, because I saw grace, evidence, in the little things, as well as the big things.

And when we have that constant attitude of prayer, we will see the glory and grace of Jesus. And it will cause us to rejoice more in him.

You know, the hymn says, Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry. Everything to God in prayer.

[33 : 27] Whatever it is. Your kid's temper tantrum. That car park space. Your work issues. We pray, not with demanding clenched fists that God's got to answer in our way.

But with open hands, entrusting the things we care about to the God who cares more about us than we care even about him. And we do that again and again and again.

Gordon Fee, who Kevin referenced last week, he's got this great quote. He says, Peace comes because prayer is an expression of trust.

Did you hear that? He said, Sometimes we need to wait.

But actually, even in the waiting, we can thank God and see his goodness to us in Christ. We walk together. We rejoice always. We pray thankfully. And the final thing is we focus on grace.

[34 : 36] Have you ever been talking to a very attractive looking person? And they had a big spot or piece of food on their face. And all you can do is fixate on that spot or that food.

You can't see the person. That's what we're like in relational conflict. That's what we're like when we're under stress. All we see is everything that's wrong.

In the other person or in our circumstances. And we miss peace because like I said before, we don't see the gracious hand of God at work in our lives, in the people around us, and in the world around us.

That's why Paul says, That's why Paul says, Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, if anything is excellent or worthy of praise, think about these things.

He's saying, He's saying, The person you have issues with, look for signs of grace. That tough situation you're in. See where it's beautiful.

[35 : 45] See where there is truthness. See where there's something worthy of praise. And you'll see tiny reflections of a gracious, beautiful, truthful, just, pure, praiseworthy God.

And make that your focus. We don't ignore issues, but we dwell on grace. And as we do these four things, we will see that we will become a kind of community that Hong Kong desperately needs.

Hong Kong needs a community of peace and joy. We can't do it by ourselves. We've got to rejoice in Jesus. We've got to pray continually. We've got to fix our eyes on the right things.

But if we're to be a people of that calm confidence and reconciled relationships in this sea of fear and hostility, we need to make space for it.

Can I be honest? I'm going to finish with this. Many of us are restless. Many of us are anxious.

[36 : 59] Many of us are intense relationships. Because we have an unguarded fortress in our hearts and our minds. The reason is we just haven't made space in our minds, in our hearts, and in our schedules for the rejoicing in God.

And for other people to invite others in to walk with us in our issues. You know, anxious people cram their days full to try and be as efficient as possible.

Anxious people are always on their phones. Anxious people are always listening to other anxious people. And always engaging with anxious news all the time.

And that's what fills your mind. This church doesn't need more headless, chicken, hurried people. It needs a people who are pursuing the God of peace.

So much that we're going to make radical decisions to make space to rejoice in him. What does that mean? Well, just think. Do you plan in your week for time to rejoice in Jesus?

[38 : 10] Jesus. Every day, switch off your phone for 30 minutes. And focus on Christ and his word. Pick up the phone.

Text someone. Invite them into your issues right now. Set aside a day or half a day, if you can only do that, to Sabbath. With your family or in community.

And don't just think about it. You've actually got to do it. You've got to plan it. You've got to put it in there. Because your joy and your peace is at stake. Are we willing to take the steps to deal with relational conflict?

Realizing that Jesus died to make us this kind of people. And the peace of God, which surpasses all your great thinking, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.

And the God of peace will be with us. Do we want that? Do we want that? Let me pray. Maybe you just actually want to do business with God right now.

[39 : 25] Just feeling, is there a restlessness in your soul? Maybe you're actually just feeling just a bit out of sorts with God at the moment.

And the idea of joy in him seems a million miles away. Maybe you've actually been pressing into God. But it feels like it's just been hard.

Wherever you are, I just want you to bring where you are to God right now. I want you to be real with him.

And I want you to ask him for a supernatural work of his spirit to fill you with the joy of seeing Jesus in the gospel, in everything around you, in hope, in grace, in power, to realize that he's what you need.

Father, I pray, make us a people of peace and joy. I pray, Lord, where there is tensions in our relationships, don't let us go another day, just letting that drift.

[40 : 38] Lord, I pray that we would come to you, the God of peace, and find mercy, find grace, find reconciliation and power to live a joy-filled life.

Let us be more consumed with you than with all the things that we chase after, realizing to become more like you is the greatest joy we can have because you are the greatest joy there is in the world. Fill us more with that joy, I pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.