

Yateley Baptist Church, Sunday 2 August 2020

Opening Prayer

Hymn

What is our hope in life and death?

Christ alone, Christ alone.

What is our only confidence?

That our souls to Him belong.

Who holds our days within His hand?

What comes, apart from his command?

And what will keep us to the end?

The love of Christ, in which we stand.

O sing Hallelujah! Our hope springs eternal;

O sing Hallelujah! Now and ever we confess

Christ our hope in life and death.

2 What truth can calm the troubled soul?

God is good, God is good.

Where is His Grace and goodness known?

In our great Redeemer's blood.

Who holds our faith when fears arise?

Who stands above the stormy trial?

Who sends the waves that bring us nigh?

Unto the shore, the rock of Christ.

3 Unto the grave, what shall we sing?

Christ, He lives, Christ, He lives!

And what reward will heaven bring?

Everlasting life with Him.

There we will rise to meet the Lord.

Then sin and death will be destroyed.

And we will feast in endless joy,

When Christ is ours for evermore.

Keith Getty & Matt Papa

Reading: Philippians 3:12-4:9, ESV

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

⁴ Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

² I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have laboured 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.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, 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. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me — practise these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Hymn: Praise! 794

Come, we that love the Lord,
and let our joys be known;
join in a song with sweet accord
and thus surround the throne.
Let those refuse to sing
who never knew our God;
but children of the heavenly king
may speak their joys abroad.

2 The God who rules on high
and all the earth surveys,
who rides upon the stormy sky,
and calms the roaring seas-
this awesome God is ours,
our Father and our love;
he will send down his heavenly powers
to carry us above.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

3 There we shall see his face
and never, never sin;
there, from the rivers of his grace
drink endless pleasures in:
and here, before we rise
to that immortal state,
the thought of such amazing bliss
should constant joy create.

4 His children here have found
glory begun below;
and heavenly fruit on earthly ground
from faith and hope may grow:
then let our songs abound
and every tear be dry;
we're marching through Immanuel's ground
to fairer worlds on high.

Prayer

Hymn: Praise! 799

Like a river glorious
is God's perfect peace,
over all victorious,
in its bright increase:
perfect, yet still flowing
fuller every day;
perfect, yet still growing
deeper all the way.

2 Hidden in the hollow
of his mighty hand,
where no harm can follow,
in his strength we stand:
we may trust him fully
all for us to do;
those who trust him wholly
find him wholly true.

*Trusting in the Father
hearts are fully blessed,
finding as he promised
perfect peace and rest.*

Frances R Havergal (1836-1879)

Sermon: Philippians 4:2-7 – Maintaining the Unity of Peace

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (7)

Covid 19 has taken away many of the joys and privileges of church membership.

A healthy church is made up of all ages, races, classes and backgrounds. Disagreements aren't necessarily a bad thing, provided that we disagree in a way which is God-honouring, and which seeks the good of the church, not simply that we have our own way in things.

There has been a vast spectrum of approaches and opinion over how the pandemic has been handled, both outside and from within the church.

Euodia and Syntyche were godly women who were disagreeing. They had “laboured side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are written in the book of life” (3) - better translated, “fought side by side with me.”

They had their names written in the book of life – the great book that will be opened on the last day, the day of judgement, when only those whose names are found within its pages will enter into the kingdom of heaven (Revelation 21:27)

Those who faithfully follow Christ know only too well the tensions and troubles that the heart of the uncommitted can never know.

The tension between the women in the church and possibly in the wider community, was jeopardising the witness of the gospel that they had fought so hard for.

"To dwell above with saints we love, Oh, that will be glory. But to dwell below with saints we know, Well, that's another story."

Paul is concerned enough about the disagreement to break off from the flow of what he was saying to make a personal plea: "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord". His plea is literally that they "think the same thing in the Lord".

Paul calls for intervention from a third party: "Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women" (3a). Whoever the "true companion" was, his task was completely clear – he was to "help" these women to reconcile.

Paul respects the authority of the local church and its members and so hands the matter over to the church at Philippi, trusting that they can apply the principles that he has set out for them in practice.

We aren't told, but it would seem they very likely did reconcile – particularly if they took the imperatives that Paul sets out immediately afterwards, to heart, because they are a prescription for the peace and wellbeing of the body of Christ in any age.

In verses 4-7, Paul lays out his list of priorities which, when followed, lead to peaceful living. We'll consider each one briefly this morning to see how we can maintain the unity of peace in the body of Christ, even while all around us outside, everyone else seems to be falling out.

1. Rejoice!

Karl Barth notes that we come across the first command in 2:18, where Paul tells the Philippians that they: "should be glad and rejoice", with him. Then again in 3:1, he writes: "Finally my brothers, rejoice in the Lord". Finally, here in 4:4, he writes: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice".

"Nevertheless!" – whatever might be happening, rejoice! What a contrast to today's world this command is!

As R. Kent Hughes so succinctly puts it: "We must never forget that Paul delivered his defiant command to rejoice whatever the circumstances when it was unsure whether he would live or die and while he was confined to helplessly watching his competitors and enemies make advances among the churches of Rome and Philippi."

"Christian joy is a basic and constant orientation of the Christian life, the fruit and evidence of our relationship with the Lord."

We can – and must – have the confidence to know that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

We must consciously and constantly remind ourselves that “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). Those whose joy is in the Lord will stand firm (4:1) and be receptive to the peace of God (4:7), which overcomes discords in the body of Christ. We cannot allow ourselves to believe that rejoicing in the Lord is a luxury – it is a vital necessity!

As we look to his glorious return and our glorification, how can we not rejoice?

But this command makes so much more sense when we lift our eyes from our current circumstances to the one who daily keeps watch over our souls. In him we can rejoice and that always, knowing that however we might feel, he is always working all things together for our good, so that we might be made more like Christ and more fit for our eternal, heavenly, home.

2. Be Reasonable

Paul says in 5a: “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone”. With this sentence, Paul introduces us to the interpersonal, relational quality that is the product of rejoicing.

“Reasonableness” = “gentleness”.

2 Corinthians 10:1 “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ”.

Matthew 11:29: “I am gentle and lowly in heart”.

This second command of Paul’s (be gentle) flows naturally from the first (rejoice). His implication is clear – when one grasps what we have to rejoice in in Christ, we will inevitably act with Christlike gentleness towards others, which necessarily involves being patient in the face of abuse and argument.

A rejoicing and gentle spirit is a healing balm to the church and to the world, and so vital in these days that we live in.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone the Lord is at hand.”

The fact that the Lord is at hand (or near) gives both energy and urgency to Paul’s commands. His nearness makes us want to pursue gentleness.

Kent Hughes: “Jesus Christ is closer than our breath, and he is returning soon! Think of it and rejoice! Think of it and be gentle!”

3. Don't Worry

“Do not be anxious about anything” or “stop worrying about anything”

For Paul, danger was a constant companion. Few things were going right for him.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25-34) Jesus calls worry “pagan” (32). He asks his hearers to consider the birds of the air as an example of God’s provision, then he asks: “Are you not of more value than they?” (26).

John Stott: *“Said the robin to the sparrow: ‘I should really like to know why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so.’ Said the sparrow to the robin” ‘Friend, I think that it must be that they have no heavenly Father, such as cares for you and me.’”*

The command is followed up by a how-to: “but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (6b).

A posture of thanksgiving is vital for Christian prayer. At the root of our prayers must be thanksgiving for all that God has done for us in Christ through the gospel.

“And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).

As we bring our requests, which reflect all of our anxieties and concerns, we are casting all of our cares upon God and declaring that we trust him – that we absolutely depend on him for all things. “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (7).

In Christ, we can experience truly powerful peace. And notice that this peace belongs to us irrespective of whether our specific prayer requests are answered or not. God’s peace mightily flows over all those who, with thanksgiving, make all their requests known to God

Always rejoicing in the Lord ⇒ people of peace, ⇒ seeking one another’s needs before our own ⇒ awareness of the nearness of our God, ⇒ casting our anxieties on him ⇒ increasingly filled with thanksgiving ⇒ able to lay out our requests before God, who knows what we need before we ask him.

As we obey these commands; as we seek to live lives that are full of rejoicing, gentleness, confidence and prayer, we receive the marvellous peace of God, which elevates our unity and the life of the church and builds an inviting haven for a world which so desperately needs to know Christ.

Hymn: Praise! 804

When peace, like a river, attends all my way,
when sorrows like sea-billows roll,
whatever my path, you have taught me to say,
'It is well, it is well with my soul.'

*'It is well with my soul,
it is well, it is well with my soul.'*

2 Though Satan may buffet, though trials may
 come,
let this calm assurance control:
that Christ knows my need and my helplessness
 here
and has shed his own blood for my soul.

Horatio G Spafford (1828-1888)

Closing Prayer

3 The joy, O the joy of this glorious thought!
my sin, not in part but the whole,
is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more;
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

4 For me it is Christ, it is Christ now to live!
Though death's waters over me roll,
no fear shall be mine, for in death as in life
you will whisper your peace to my soul.

5 But, Lord, for your coming in glory we wait;
the sky, not the grave, is our goal;
the trumpet shall sound and the Lord shall
 descend:
bless the Lord, bless the Lord, O my soul!