

Sermon Given by

David Green

At the Evening Service on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2010

### Philippians 4:2-9 - "Rejoice always"

---

I wonder how do you deal with all the things that there are to do in life? I find that the most important thing is to have a 'To Do' list so that I don't forget what needs doing. And nowadays with all the technological advancements more and more people are using mobile phones or the internet for their to do lists. So out of interest I was having a look online yesterday to see what was available online and to my surprise there were over 450 million results for 'to do list program'. I only bothered looking at the first few, but they included Sproutliner (which describes itself as a supercharged structured to do list) and there was Toodledo (an advanced to do list which allows you to organise your tasks into different folders, assign due dates, priorities, contexts, notes, time estimates, subtasks and so on). My favourite was called 'Rough Underbelly' where you give yourself points for completing a task. But what I realised though is that so often these online to do lists just overcomplicate what needs doing and take as long to set up as the tasks themselves. So I've decided, atleast for the time being, to still with good old fashioned pen and paper for my to do lists.

The passage we are looking at today is a to do list. It's a list of instructions which Paul wants to impress on the believers in Philippi. And it isn't just a random list of things that Paul has forgotten to mention earlier in the letter, but I think it can be held together by means of verse 1, ***'Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!'*** The verse summarises what we were looking at two weeks ago about how our citizenship is in heaven and the way we stand firm as Christians is to remember and live in light of that future. And this theme of standing firm continues in v2-9 as it shows what living in light of the future will look like in our day to day living. I think it splits nicely into 6 points, all beginning with the letter R, but don't worry as we won't spend that long on each of them.

**Reconcile** – The first point on the list is Reconcile, v2-3 ***'I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.'*** We don't know much about the disagreement between these two Christian women in Philippi, but it seems likely that it wasn't over a fundamental Christian truth because Paul would have dealt with it head on if it was (like he did with the Judiazers in Chapter 3). What we do know though is that Paul takes their disunity very seriously. He pleads with them to agree on the fundamental truths, that they are united in Christ and that their citizenship is in heaven. This personal dispute cannot get in the way of what really matters – the cause of the gospel. And somehow they need to resolve things so that they are pulling in the same direction again. This is such a serious issue that after pleading with them individually he asks a trusted friend to come and help them to ensure that the disagreement is dealt with. And I think the challenge for us is do we have any Christian brothers or sisters whom we need to be reconciled with? If so, don't delay, but talk it through

with them and be reconciled as it is a serious issue. This may just be a case of something we need to store up for the future as being forewarned helps us be forearmed. It's a very serious matter when believers fall out with one another over secondary issues. So first on the list, reconcile.

**Rejoice:** Second, Rejoice, v4, *'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!'* Paul isn't saying I want you to be happy all the time, with a smile on your face at the expense of tears. This is not about happiness. Happiness is temporary and relies on situations – you can be happy one minute, and then the phone rings and you can be unhappy. No, what Paul is talking about is joy – it is much more substantial than happiness as it is not dictated by our circumstances. Hence Paul can say rejoice in the Lord always, no matter what we face we should rejoice. But how is it that we can rejoice even when hardships come?

The reason is the grounds of our rejoicing. Paul is telling the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ and there are plenty of reasons to do that aren't there. Just think about it for a moment. We can rejoice because we can know God perfectly through Jesus – God isn't distant and unknowable, but we can know God truly by knowing Jesus. We can rejoice that he came into the world, and that he went to the cross and paid the price for our sin. He came to do what we could never do so that we can be forgiven and righteous in God's sight. We can be children of God because of Jesus. We can rejoice because he was raised from the dead and is the king in heaven today. We can rejoice because one day every knee will bow before him. If we put our minds to it we can go on all night and come up with reasons to rejoice in Jesus. And the wonderful thing is that those things never change. They never will, even if our circumstances are difficult or painful, like those Paul faced when he wrote this letter, those truths about the Lord Jesus will always remain true. Our joy won't necessarily be expressed in joyfulness and singing. It can be shown in many different ways, but in each of us should be visible our praise and delight in the Lord Jesus. Christians should be the most joyful people on earth – at the office tomorrow, at school, at home, when we are shopping, where ever we are rejoice in the Lord always. There's the story of John Collins, who used to be vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton and he was given a watch for his birthday and it was inscribed on the back with his initials, he's got 5, JCTBC, the date of his birthday and then Philippians 4:4. Someone asked him why he had Philippians 4:4 put on his watch and his response was look at the verse – whatever time it is I know that it is time to rejoice in the Lord. *'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice'*. The problem is that we so easily get caught up in the busyness of life and all that there is to do that we forget how much we have to Rejoice in. So Paul is calling us to be deliberate about it, not just knowing that these things are true, but actually to dwell on the Lord Jesus. Actively to focus our minds on Jesus, to consider his character, to remind ourselves of all that he's done and to praise him for it. What a difference it would make if we deliberately obeyed that command. If we focused on the Lord Jesus more it would make us more joyful people. We should rejoice in the Lord.

**Radiate Gentleness:** Thirdly we should radiate gentleness, v5 – *'let your gentleness be evident to all'*. I think part of the reason Paul told the Philippians to radiate gentleness is to do with their circumstances. You may remember back in Chapter 1 that the Philippians were facing persecution and the question is how should they respond? Surely we would think one of brave defiance, wouldn't we wish for that if we were in their situation? To be brave. That

those who oppose us would know that we are tough. Or maybe that we argue our case with great skill. But no, Paul says that the impression to leave on everyone is one of gentleness. That sounds feeble though doesn't it. Until we remember that is how Jesus faced his opponents. Paul speaks elsewhere of Christ's meekness and gentleness. He didn't fight back, but patiently listened to the abuse that was poured on him. And Paul calls the Philippians to display the same character. Now again this may be relevant to us now, or else for some time in the future. If we are facing any kind of opposition for our faith in Christ the thing that people should be seeing in us is gentleness, not promoting ourselves by our sharp words or our tough character. We are still to display love and kindness to radiate gentleness. And the challenge for us is that how people would describe us? Is that how our colleagues at work, our wives or husbands, our parents, or those we don't get on well with describe us? As people who radiate Gentleness? We need to work on it, becoming like the Lord Jesus.

**Rely on God:** Moving down the list, fourthly Rely on God, v6-7, ***'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'*** In many ways our generation should worry less than any that has gone before us. Life is generally safer and more secure for us in the affluent west than it has been for anyone else at any time. Advances in sanitation and health care have made us less susceptible to disease. Childbirth is much less risky. General standards of living are much higher, and here we are with over 60 years of peace on these shores. There is so much going for us, yet if there is one thing that seems to mark out our generation, one characteristic, then it would be that we are great worriers. I think partly because we know more about the world. We discover new diseases and come across new environmental threats, and there are better communications. Some event anywhere in the world could have us worried. Then there is the explosion of information – lists, reports and league tables, and that means that we become paranoid that we might be making wrong choices the whole time, that we will be exposed by tomorrow's report, and we could go on. We worry about everything, don't we? In light of our modern condition Paul's command may seem grossly naive. V6 ***'Do not be anxious about anything'*** Doesn't that just seem unrealistic, not to be anxious about anything. And how can Paul say it when he's in prison, isn't that something to be anxious about? Well what we are failing to see is how our anxieties may be overcome. In a word pray. Actively rely on God. V6 ***'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'*** If we are anxious about anything then we should tell God and a wonderful thing will happen. Did you see the promise in v7, ***'And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus'***. That sounds great, but what exactly is Paul saying? He's not promising that circumstances will be altered, or that our troubles will be taken away. No, Paul is talking about the peace of God, which I think we are to understand as God's own peace, which is to be seen in contrast to our worry. Because if there is one thing that God doesn't do it's worry. We worry all the time because we feel that life is often out of our control, but life is very definitely in God's control. Everything is in his plans, and he is working all things out for his glory and for his people's eternal good. So we can have confidence for the future because God is in control and it puts our anxieties into proportion. I've found these verses really helpful over these last few weeks as I've been rejected from several job applications. It is easy to be discouraged and question if God is in control, but these verses have been such a great reminder that I can trust God as he is in control, and since praying about it I have received peace about the issue. These are

great verses and I think the challenge for us is are we anxious about anything? And if so have we prayed about it? You may feel that it is too unimportant to bother God about, but it comes under the category of everything and God cares about us and wants us to cast all our anxieties onto him. So when we are anxious about something let's make it a trigger to rely on God. To pray to him.

**Resolve to think holy thoughts:** Fifthly we should resolve to thin holy thoughts. Look at v8 '***Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – think about such things.***' Paul is very concerned by what we think about and I think the challenge for us is what is our thoughtlife most occupied by? If you were to keep a diary of the thoughts for your day what sort of reading would it make at the end of the day? And how would it line up against verse 8? The thing is that as the old saying goes sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act reap a habit. Sow a habit reap a character, sow a character reap a destiny. Therefore the battle for the mind which v8 speaks of is the key. Paul wants us to think about good, excellent, praiseworthy things because if we think holy thoughts we will live holy lives, but if what we fill our minds with and if we what we find ourselves chewing over the whole time is worthless and false and degrading then our lives are bound to follow. It will need conscious effort though to think holy thoughts as it doesn't come naturally to us. But we can do things to help us think about such things. For example we can turn the tv or radio off when it's talking about unhelpful things, or more positively we can read the Bible each day to remind us of wonderful truths, we can meet like we are now, or in midweek groups to remind each other of what is good, what is best, that our thoughts may be focused on the best in life. And it shouldn't be something we just do once or twice a week, but we should try and think about it each day – maybe for example with the help of things like post it notes dotted around your home with reminders on. Paul set his mind on holy things. He cultivated great thoughts about the Lord Jesus Christ. He glorified in the cross and the challenge is will we? Paul's encouragement is to Resolve to think holy thoughts.

**Resolve to live a holy life:** Flowing on from that is our final point, Resolve to live a holy life. Look at v9 '***Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice.***' The key word in v8 was think, here the key word is do. Put into practice. You know again and again we pray that we wouldn't just be hearers of God's word, but doers also. And the question is how have you found it over these last 2 months looking at the letter to the Philippians? Have our lives changed as a result? Because there is no point just knowing the book a bit better if our lives haven't been changed as a result.

So are our lives more gospel centred as a result of looking at Philippians? Do we have a greater joy? Do we have a greater concern for others? Are we looking forward to our home in heaven more? How has studying Philippians affected us? It won't come naturally putting what we've learnt into practise, which is why we need to resolve to live a holy life, to put what we've learnt into practise.

So there we have Paul's to do list of how we should live in light of the future. We haven't had time to do justice to all there is in these verses, but I hope that it has given us a glimpse of how we should live in light of our future home in heaven. So quickly to summarise what we've looked at. Firstly there was Reconcile – and the challenge is do we need to make our peace with someone? Second, rejoice. Delight in the Lord Jesus Christ, for who he is and what he's done. Thirdly, radiate gentleness, even to those who oppose you, do we need an

adjustment to our attitude in that one? Fourthly, Rely in God. Are we anxious about anything that we haven't yet turned to prayer. Fifthly, Resolve to think holy thoughts – what do we spend our time thinking about? How helpful is it? And finally, Resolve to live a holy life – are we just people who hear God's word and then ignore it, or will we live differently as a result? Let me ask how are we doing on that list. Are there any that really need attention? Well if so don't leave tonight without resolving to take action and pray about that.

But finally there is one small encouragement with all these. Did you notice in the middle of verse 5, ***'the Lord is near'***. The one in whom we are to stand firm, the Lord Jesus isn't far from us, he is near, and that is an encouragement for all of those. It is an encouragement to be in good standing with other Christians if he is near, to rejoice in what he's done, to display his character rather than our own, to rely on him rather than worrying, to think on what is best and live accordingly. The Lord is near. Let's pray to him, but before that let's just spend a moment in quiet thinking through this list and deciding if there are any that we need to focus on in particular.

---

Audio versions of the sermons can be freely downloaded from the All Saints Little Shelford website, <http://www.allsaintslittleshelford.org>. These are available in two formats, mp3 and wma.

(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)