

Joy in Sorrow (v.4)

- As we've looked at this whole book, in the background has been one fact.
 - we mentioned it while looking at Philippians 1, but haven't really highlighted it since
- Fact is this:
 - Paul is in prison.**
- Paul is **suffering** as he writes; he is **limited** in what he can do; he faces an **uncertain future**; indeed, his very **life is on the line**.
- That is the context for everything he has written - **that is the backdrop**, the canvas against which he is painting this picture of God's upside down kingdom.
- And its with another "**upside down**" value that Paul chooses to close his letter - look at verse 4!
 - *"May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!"*
- **Joy in the face of sorrow, joy in the face of suffering, joy in his union with the Lord:**
 - and an encouragement that we would know that same joy in OUR union with the Lord
- This was an upside down value Paul knew well:
 - imagine how this verse might have been received by that church in Philippi... I wonder if their minds went back to the first time they had met Paul, years previously... to the time when his casting out of a demon from a slave girl, so that she could no longer tell the future, caused a riot that ended with Paul and his companion Silas in prison... to the songs that Paul and Silas were heard singing, in praise of God, in that prison... of the earthquake that struck that night... of the joy that came to the Philippian jailer as he found new life in Jesus Christ... that jailer who was quite likely sitting listening to this latest letter from Paul!
 - **Joy in the face of sorrow and suffering, and joy out of suffering and sorrow!**
- That Joy is "**in union with Christ Jesus**" - in other words, Paul found joy as he first concentrated his attention on Jesus Christ and on his relationship with Him.
 - it was then that the rest - **the prison, the pain, the betrayal** - fell into place and he was able again to know that joy in the Lord;
 - **rather than starting with the problem, Paul knew that the place to start was with Jesus Christ.**
- And so, in this closing chapter of his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul seeks to do that in a number of different areas that were of concern for the church in Philippi:
 - a variety of different things, quite distinct from each other - typical of the end of Paul's letters;
 - yet **held together** by this **common thread** of Paul's desire to see his friends in Philippi **rejoicing in the Lord** as they confronted these areas.
- Perhaps you feel held back by some kind of suffering or sorrow - held back from the joy that God has promised:
 - What is your "sorrow"? What is holding you back from joy in the Lord?

Joy in Unity (v.2-3)

- Perhaps your sorrow, your pain, is that of broken relationship?
- All sorts of different kinds:
 - been let down by a friend; relationship never same again;
 - children and parents who've fallen out;
 - brothers and sisters who've not spoken to each other in years;
 - divorce and separation;
 - perhaps it is here in the congregation, a relationship that is actually the scene of conflict;
- Maybe you've ended up unsure of who you can trust, hurt, angry, bitter.
- **Story:**
 - A couple of students had started going out in their first term at University. They'd become apparently inseparable during the two years they went out. But as they

grew up they also grew apart, and eventually the guy broke things off. He made a particularly bad job of it, and hurt the girl badly. They were Christians, both involved in the CU - and they both went to the same church. But they wouldn't speak to each other. Frosty, cold, bitter, angry. Years later - in fact after they were both married (not to each other!), the guy realised that the low-level hatred and anger that existed was wrong - peace was clearly not present. So he went and apologised. Reconciliation. Restoration of friendship.

- There are times when complete restoration is impossible - as in that little story, after is never the same as what went before - but **improvement is almost always possible**.
- **Look at how Paul confronted the pain and sorrow of a falling out within the church fellowship at Philippi:**
 - Euodia and Syntyche - both Christians, both of whom had worked hard to spread the gospel alongside Paul;
 - had fallen out over something;
 - **Paul wasn't content that the situation smouldered on - he confronted it;**
 - he appealed to them to seek reconciliation, and as he did so very careful not to take sides, or deal with one as if she was right and the other wrong... - the **original problem is pushed to the background** (we don't know what it was) and **reconciliation is pushed into the foreground**.
 - Paul also made sure that someone else in the church was on the case, supporting, helping, challenging these women to be reconciled; (for a broken relationship, sniping, parties who think one side or the other is right, all these things are immensely damaging to the witness of a church!)
- If you find yourself in this kind of situation, in a broken relationship where there is something you can do to bring a measure of reconciliation, then take your courage in both hands, ask God for help, and go to that other person:
 - apologise for your part in the falling out;
 - seek some way of bringing reconciliation;
 - ask for help and support, perhaps from mutual friends or someone you know and whose faith you respect.
- Seeking such reconciliation is one of those things that always seems much, much harder in prospect, as you think about it, than it proves in practise:
 - in fact, **there is a sweet joy in reconciliation, in pain and sorrow abated**.
- **Search out that joy in the face of sorrow, that joy in unity.**

Joy in Peace (v.6-7)

- But maybe your sorrow isn't so much the sorrow of damaged relationships...
 - ...perhaps your "sorrow" is **worry, anxiety** - money, situations beyond your control, events that may happen, fear of accidents, fear of something happening to your family - what would you do?
- Paul knew that there were some in Philippi who faced this **"sorrow"** too
- He himself had had plenty of reason to worry over the years:
 - unsure of where his next meal or place to stay would come from;
 - uncertain of the reception he would receive in a new city, when in the past he'd been beaten and hounded out;
 - burdened by the immensity of the task God had given him, to reach the Gentiles with the Gospel, and the amount remaining to be done!
- **But he had found peace despite all those possible reasons for worry.**
- **He found peace by re-orienting himself onto God's perspective;** taking a reality check, realising that what he saw with his human eyes wasn't the ultimate truth about a situation.
- **He made this reality check by doing two things,** reflected here in **vs.5 and 6:**
 - **first,** he **looked forward** to what was **ultimately in store for him;** he lifted his eyes up out of the current situation, and looked forward to the promise of an eternity

with God, one where there will be no more sorrow or mourning: "The Lord is coming soon!";

- **second**, he **looked back** at all the things **God had done down through the years**, both in his own life and in the history of God's people: "**always asking him with a THANKFUL heart**";
- And **looking forward and back** he did in God's company - in prayer.
- In other words, **he consciously stopped and talked to God**, taking God's perspective, and made himself look forward to heaven and back to God's faithfulness - taking the perspective that Scripture gives us.
- That's hard to do - and for some harder than others.
 - I confess I'm **not** one prone to worry, by character - I have other weaknesses!!
- Its hard to stop and take a God oriented perspective on reality when the world's reaction is to worry:
 - insurance;
 - the tone of TV programs and newspaper articles demanding that something be done about the latest mistakes leading us not to trust doctors, lawyers, professionals, whoever;
- Surveys these days indicate that a very low proportion of young people expect the world to be better when they are older - contrast with 40 years ago, when most expected it to be better.
- We live in a "**worrying**" society.
- Hard as it is to break out of that, it is worth having a go at!
 - for peace, a peace that passes all human understanding, is the result of taking God's perspective on whatever our situation is
- Its as if we had something wrong with our eyes, and need to continually make sure we have our glasses on:

Story:

 - Dad - sight problems, long time undiagnosed - eventually went to optician - came out onto St Vincent St in Glasgow - could see to the other end of the street!! - had never realised that was possible!!
- We need to continually check that we have things in focus, in perspective - taking time to pray, to look forward with hope in God's faithfulness, and back with thanksgiving for God's goodness.
 - As someone put it: "**Anxiety and prayer are more opposed to each other than fire and water!**"
- **Joy in the peace that comes through this kind of prayer, rather than the sorrow and pain of worry.**

Joy in Noble Character (v.8-9)

- Maybe your "**sorrow**" is the way you are as a person, your character:
 - say things to those you love that hurt them;
 - you lose your temper and regret it later;
 - you allow your mind to dwell on things that are clearly disobedient and contrary to God's will;
 - you find yourself being greedy, even if only in thought...
 - etc, etc, etc!!
- **Do you ever despair of changing?** Of being more like you should be? As you look at Scripture, realising just how far you are from the way Jesus lived?
- Do you yearn for an integrity in the face of pressure of sorrow and pain - joy in noble character, because it is Jesus we seek to be like?
- Have you not met a few people whose Christian character spilled out from them? Just lovely people to know - helpful, gentle, always truthful, reliable
 - my parents were friendly with an older couple, former missionaries and later minister/wife - through all the days I knew that man, I've wanted to be like him -

gentle, at peace, content, a delight! Because he knows and loves the Lord! I want to be like that when I grow old!

- How do we become like that and enjoy the joy and peace they know?
 - Paul says "fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honourable." (v.8)
- Fill your minds - "think about such things" (NIV) - CONSIDER (Greek), chew them over, concentrate on them - conscious effort!
 - switch off the TV and read some Scripture;
 - take time out from reading the latest thriller, filled with violence or sex, and lift a Christian book;
 - some of the time, put off the music you normally listen to and either have some quiet, or put on something that reflects what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, honourable - whether Christian or secular.
- Now we need to be careful not to become ghettoised Christians - cut off from the world - BUT do need to guard our minds, consciously dwell on that which is good.
 - story: bank clerk - how do you tell counterfeit notes? should I study all the different forging techniques? etc. NO - spend time with the real thing, handle it, count it - and the fake stuff will just not feel right...
- Fill your minds... - and know the joy of noble character slowly grow within you.

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you...

- Joy in the face of sorrow, joy even coming out of difficulty!
 - Paul's vivid portrait of the upside down kingdom shines through once more
- From beginning to end this letter to the Philippians Paul has encouraged them - and us - to live as citizens of this upside down kingdom:
 - Dying to ourselves that we might live;
 - Counting everything we might otherwise consider profit as loss, that we might gain Jesus Christ;
 - Learning that the way to greatness in God's Kingdom is down through humility and servant-hood;
 - And finding that joy can come out of sorrow.
- All of which simply reflects the God whose Kingdom it is:
 - for, as Paul says in the very last verse, he is a God of GRACE
- That's a word I often mis-understood.
- Used so much in church, we often kind of let it flow past us.
- Simplest and best way I've ever heard it explained is this:
 - God doesn't treat us as we deserve - and that's grace.
- We are sinners - we deserve nothing; we don't deserve to be in his kingdom; we don't deserve to become great in his kingdom; we don't deserve anything other than sorrow for all the wrong we have done; we owe God, not him us.
 - but God doesn't treat as we deserve
 - he came in his son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place, to grant us new life as we respond in faith to him, to blaze that down-ward path to greatness in his Kingdom, to show how joy can come from sorrow
- What an upside down God!
- What an upside down Kingdom!
- Let's delight to join as full citizens of God's upside down Kingdom, giving him our all, living by his upside down standards, and knowing his grace in our lives day by day.