

Joy When Life is Tough - Philippians
Part 7
“Peace In Turmoil”
Philippians 4:10-13
Pastor Charles Price

If you were to meet somebody who said to you, I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, I wonder how you would respond to them. Well, I don't know you well enough, probably to know how you might respond, but I would guess that some would be very cautious about anybody who made that kind of statement to you. Probably a little cynical, maybe. And if you believe them at all, you'd probably conclude that life was pretty easy for them, pretty cushy for them. And they certainly didn't have the kind of pressures that you have to live with.

You'd probably say to yourself, well, if you've learned to be content, you have not experienced my disappointments. If you've learned to be content, you don't face the kind of temptations that I face all the time. If you've learned to be content, you probably don't have my kind of fears. You probably don't have my job. You're certainly not married to my wife; you might think, and you definitely don't have my kids or my neighbours. Yet that is exactly what Paul wrote in the verses that we've just had read to us.

In fact, he said it twice in Philippians 4:11-12. He said, "I've learned to be content whatever the circumstances." And then he says, "I've learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. Whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." In other words, my circumstances are an irrelevancy to this learning to be content that I have discovered. Well, you

say to yourself, if Paul is saying this, he must be in a pretty good environment to be able to write that kind of way.

Maybe he's on vacation when he wrote this. He sounds in a good mood. But as you know, if you've been here in previous weeks, when Paul wrote this, he was writing from the Roman prison, where he was in chains, where he had lost five of the best years of his life, humanly speaking. Two years in prison in Caesarea, two years in prison in Rome. Almost a year getting from Caesar to Rome. In round figures about five years; and yet he's discovered something which he says, I've learned. I've learned the secret of being content.

But that isn't all, he says in Philippians 4:4, "rejoice in the Lord always. I'll say it again. Rejoice!" I've not just learned to be content, says Paul. I've learned to rejoice. And I'm telling you, Philippian Christians, rejoice. And in case you think I've written the wrong word by mistake; I'll say it twice. Rejoice! Now, it sounds unreasonable to rejoice just because somebody tells you to, doesn't it? I mean, if you're having a bad day, things are going wrong. The last thing you want is somebody walking up to you and saying, Hey, rejoice, smile.

Well, actually, Paul doesn't say rejoice always. What he says, and it's very important to recognize what he says, he says, rejoice in the Lord always. Now don't miss that bit, because this is the key to what he's going to write about in this chapter.

Rejoice in the Lord. It's this that makes your rejoicing something totally different to any human activity, simply. In fact, this is the theme of these first few verses. If you look at Philippians 4:1, he says, "therefore my brothers, you whom I love and long for my joy and crown."

This is how you should stand firm in the Lord dear friends. Now, he says to these Philippians, I'm telling you to stand firm, but to stand firm in the Lord. There are things, situations and events which may weaken you, but I'm telling you stand firm in the Lord. That's in Philippians 4:1. In Philippians 4:2, he speaks to a couple of women called Euodia and Syntyche, and he says, I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Now, he says, instead of you two women fighting and being on each other's backs all the time. We don't know what they're fighting about, but they're clearly fighting, and it was clearly an embarrassment to the church in Philippi. Pauls even heard about it in prison in Rome. So, he says, you two women, you have resources that normal people down the street don't have. Agree in the Lord, whatever that means.

Then in Philippians 4:4, "rejoice in the Lord". Later, in Philippians 4:7, he says, the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Again, the same idea in the Lord. Now, this isn't just a pious cliché that Paul is using to make it sound spiritual. This is actually the key that he's telling them, to live within their circumstances and learn to be content in any circumstances. You see, if Paul had written and said, now you brothers, you make sure you stand firm. They might have said to Paul, but Paul we've been trying to stand firm and we can't. We're getting blown away all the time by all these gales that come across our lives. We can't stand firm Paul.

If Paul had written and said to these two women. You make sure you agree with each other. They probably would have said, we have tried, we've been trying for six months, but she just won't cooperate. That would have been unrealistic, wouldn't it. If he just says, hey come on, lift your chin up. Rejoice always! That would have been unrealistic. But he doesn't say that to any of those three situations. Rather, he says, in situations where you are being blown around and you find it difficult to stand, stand firm in the Lord.

Where people have fallen out with each other, reconcile, he says in the Lord. Where circumstances and problems are facing you. I'm telling you, he says, rejoice in the Lord. And writing as he is from a Roman prison, he knows exactly what he's talking about, because he says in Philippians 4:10, "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me." But he says, I rejoice in the Lord. This isn't some theory, some doctrine, some pious platitude that's nice to say to each other on Sundays, but actually on Monday is totally irrelevant because it's completely unreal.

He's saying there are resources that you have which outside of Christ you don't have. You see, when he began this chapter, he begins with, 'therefore my brothers.' And he relates that to what's gone before and in the end of Philippians 3:19, he talks about certain people who presumably are Christians. He talks about those who are seemingly in the church, but they're living with their backs turned to Christ, and he says their mind is on earthly things. That is, they live their Christian lives purely by human resources, and they're defeated again and again and again.

But I'm telling you, he says, that the way you are to live, the way you are to stand firm, the way you are to get on with each other, the way you are to rejoice is in the Lord. Now what does this mean practically? Well, there are two things in this chapter. We'll talk about one of them this morning, and then next Sunday morning, we'll pick this up again and look at the second aspect. But how do you rejoice in a hostile environment?

What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord? What does 'in the Lord' actually mean? Practically, realistically? So it's alright on a Sunday morning to talk about this, but how about tomorrow? How about Wednesday? How about Thursday night? How about when the pressure's on?

Well, Paul talks, first of all, about how to survive internally in your own inner world in the Lord. And then we'll see next week how to survive externally in the Lord. How do you actually cope with difficult circumstances that you find yourself in?

First of all, he talks about surviving internally in the Lord. Let me read you Philippians 4:6-7, which is the key to this. In Philippians 4:6-7 he says. "Do not be anxious about anything." Let me just pause there a minute. That again is rather unrealistic, isn't it? Again, if somebody stops you and says, hey, don't be anxious about anything, you might say to that person, you live in a different world to me. I mean, what if you have bills that you can't pay and someone says, don't be anxious about anything?

What if you go to visit your doctor for some routine examination and you discover you have some illness and somebody says to you, don't be anxious about anything? What if you go to

work tomorrow morning and you're called into the manager's office and he says, I'm afraid in these declining economic days we're living in, some jobs have to go, I'm sorry about this, but yours is one of them. And you are out of a job and you have a mortgage to pay and kids to look after. Don't be anxious about anything. What do you mean? What if you are sitting here this morning and your marriage is falling apart and somebody says, don't be anxious about anything and you say, how can I not be anxious? I mean, is Paul being realistic when he says these things?

Well, let's read on. Do not be anxious about anything, but..... and I may have said this already, and I'll certainly be saying it again from time to time, that little word but is one of the biggest words in the Bible. I have a marking system in my Bible, and I have one colour for which I use for words like but, because that word 'but' is a hinge on which the door swings and everything changes with it. "Don't be anxious, but in everything he says, that is in everything that might make you anxious by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Instead of being anxious, he says, but in everything, in the things that normally make you anxious, by prayer and petition present the situation to God.

That's more than just praying about it, because some of us may talk to God about things, but we actually don't give the things to God. We talk to God about them, take them back and go on as though nothing has changed. But if you present them to God with thanksgiving, thanking him for what? Thanking him for the problems? No! Thanking him for himself in the problem. Thanking him for his presence, his sufficiency, his wisdom, his power in the situation. There was a craze a while ago and we were encouraged to thank God for everything, even bad things, even evil

things, even sinful things. But that is not what the scripture teaches us. When Paul writes about this in 1Thessalonians 5:18 he says, give thanks in all circumstances, that's different to giving thanks for all circumstances. That is in every situation you give thanks for what? You thank him for himself. Lord Jesus, this situation frightens me. This situation threatens me, but I want to thank you. Nothing frightens you. Nothing threatens you. Nothing is too big for you. And he says, instead of anxiety, when you give this situation to God with thanksgiving, the peace of God, which transcends understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus? And again, that phrase in Christ Jesus, it's in the Lord. You see, this peace is not dependent on some human resources that you can explain away, and the neighbour can experience the same kind of peace.

This is a peace which passes understanding, which only has divine explanations, supernatural resources, and as a result, he says this peace guards your hearts and your minds in Christ. Putting it crudely, this peace comes in passing the buck to somebody bigger, giving the buck to God and saying, God, this is your situation. Thank you that you're capable within it to bring about your purposes.

Let me illustrate this idea of passing the responsibility. I remember several years ago I was sitting at home in our lounge, my wife was out for the evening. Our children were in bed and suddenly from the room of one of our daughters, she was in those days about four, I heard this scream of terror. It wasn't just a cry for somebody to go to her, she was terrified. I got up, I ran to her room, put on the light, went and sat on the edge of the bed next to Laura, she was half sitting

up in bed. I wrapped my arms around her, she wrapped her arms around me, and I said, 'Laura, what's the matter?'

And she said, there's somebody in the cupboard. I said, no, no, Laura, there's nobody in the cupboard. She said there is somebody in the cupboard. I said, Laura, there's no one in the cupboard, they won't fit. But she said there is, there is someone in the cupboard. I said Laura, you've had a nasty dream and I held onto her tightly and she calmed down. And as she calmed down in the silence as I held her in my arms, suddenly, to my amazement, I heard a noise from the cupboard. And I thought to myself, there's someone in the cupboard. I looked at Laura, her eyes were the size of saucers looking at me and I said, 'Laura, you stay there.' And I got up, walked across to the cupboard, the wardrobe, put one hand on each handle. I looked back at Laura, she was staring up at me, her eyes, you know, popping out of her head just about.

I stood back a little bit and then opened both doors, and there in the cupboard was the cat, locked in the cupboard. So, I picked it up and put it out of the window and went and sat on the bed, took Laura in my arms and I said, 'Laura, that was a nasty fright wasn't it? Naughty cat. Who put the cat in the cupboard? Now you snuggle down and go back to sleep.' She said, 'but I'm afraid.' I said, 'I know you've had a nasty fright. But it was only the cat and the cats gone now. You saw it go, it will be landing shortly.'

She said, 'but I'm still scared. I'm still afraid. Will you stay with me?' And I said, 'why?' She said, 'because if you stay, I won't be afraid anymore.' I said, 'why not?' She said, 'because you're not afraid, so I won't be.'

Well, she didn't know me as well as she thought she did. But I understood exactly what she needed, so I tucked her up and I stayed in the room and within a few minutes, she was asleep. What she was saying was this, there's something that frightened me and you can explain it away, and I know it was the cat and I saw the cat go, but I'm still scared. But if you're here, I'll be OK. What is she saying? She's saying this. I'm secure in my Dad. That's what she is saying, because anything that is going to get me is going to get him first.

And she said to herself, he can handle it, he's not scared. That's what she said to herself. And when Paul talks about this peace being in the Lord. It's on this basis of recognizing the realities of life, but presenting to God with thanksgiving, saying Father, this is bigger than me. By human resources I cannot cope with this situation, but I want to thank you. You're alive, you're in me. Thank you for your sufficiency. Thank you, whatever happens to me in this situation, it'll work out for good.

That's what Paul said earlier in Philippians 1. What has happened to me, he said, has worked out for good. That was in the prison in Philippi, I am going to trust you in this. And instead of anxiety, he says, there's a peace, a peace which passes understanding. It's not rational. You can't explain it, but it's a peace which comes from knowing that somebody bigger than me is my security and my strength, and I've learned not only to rejoice in him, but experience the peace of God.

You see, we tend to think of peace by definition as the absence of conflict. When we send peacekeeping forces into different parts of the world, what we are doing is sending people to keep the opposing parties at bay, so there's no longer any fighting. That's how we define peace, the absence of conflict. But that isn't the kind of peace Paul's talking about here. This is a peace in the midst of conflict, that was his own experience. In the midst of turmoil, that was his experience in Rome in prison.

Let me illustrate this. I heard some years ago now about a painting competition that was held in England and in this painting competition, the subject to be painted was peace. And there were two prize winners. One had gone to the Lake District, up in the northwest part of the country and painted a beautiful picture on a summer's day with a lake in the foreground and the mountain range in the background. Beautiful clear blue sky. They probably waited a long time for that. Couple of puffs of white clouds just to break up the monotony of the sky.

The mountains were reflected in the calm waters of the lake. In the foreground a family of ducks were floating by and he looked at the picture and you said to yourself, what a beautiful place. I'd love to go there. It made you feel warm. And he called his picture peace, and he won second prize.

The other artist had gone down to the southwest corner of England, where the county of Cornwall runs into the Atlantic Ocean. And he painted a picture of a storm and halfway across the picture was a cliff which came down into the Atlantic ocean, and there were great waves

rolling in from the Atlantic, beating against the base of the cliffs, sending up their surf. The sky was black, the rain was beating down, there was a lightning bolt across one corner of the picture.

There was a tree on the top of the cliff at a 45-degree angle as the gales came in from the sea. You looked at that picture, you thought to yourself, what a miserable place. It made you feel cold, I'm glad I'm not there, I'm glad I'm indoors. And two thirds of the way up the cliff there was a cleft in the rock and in the cleft of the rock there was a nest. And on the nest, there was a gull with its eyes closed and he called his picture peace and he won first prize.

You see the kind of peace that passes understanding is not the tranquil peace of the beautiful Lake District. That doesn't defy understanding, people take their vacations there in order to get that peace, they understand it perfectly. But the peace that passes understanding is that rest in the midst of turmoil and trouble and trauma. I don't know what kind of life you're experiencing right now, but you can be sure of this. Whatever degree of trouble you're in, all of us have things in our lives that we wish for different. Things in our lives that we wish could be changed. Things in our lives that we wish would just go away. Maybe people who bug us like Syntyche and Euodia; maybe you identify with that. Maybe like the people to whom he says, you should stand firm because you know you've not been standing firm at all.

You've been blown here and there by every wind. Maybe because your basic disposition is a miserable one and you know very little of rejoicing in the Lord. Paul says, I'm talking to you about something which is not natural. It is supernatural in its source. Because everything about the Christian life is supernatural, otherwise it's just a do-it-yourself exercise. And you bring God

in, that's why back in Ephesians 6 in the previous letter in your Bibles, when Paul was writing also from prison in Philippi. In fact, on the same occasion, he says in Ephesians 6:10 he says, finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. It is possible for you to be strong, he says, not in human resources, because many of us have lived by human resources and we know their limitations.

We maybe have a sense of bankruptcy about that in our own lives. Now says Paul, present the situation to God. Don't take it on, present it to God and say, Father, I give this to you. I want to thank you for your sufficiency and your presence and your reality. And instead of anxiety, there's a peace he says, which passes understanding that guards your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. And you see, this is not just theory with Paul, because he says to them in Philippians 4:9," whatever you've learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice and the God of peace will be with you."

Now he says, you know me, you Philippian Christians and what you have learned from me, what you have seen in me, you live that way and the God of peace you've seen in me, will be in every bit in you. Now what have the Philippians seen of Paul? Well, we know quite a bit about what they've seen of Paul, because if you look in Acts 16 some time you've got the record of Paul's first visit to Philippi, maybe his only visit. And when he arrived in Philippi it was the first time he'd ever been to Europe. Philippi is in Greece and there were no Christian believers there because the gospel had not yet come to Philippi. But he found a group of women, probably Jewish women, meeting by the river to pray. He joined them and explained to them the gospel of

Christ, and God opened the hearts of some of them, and they were born again of the spirit of God and a church was formed.

And one day, Paul was going down the street in Philippi when a girl who was possessed by a demon, an evil spirit who used to be able to tell fortunes, she was a fortune teller empowered by an evil spirit to do that; owned by two men who made their living out of using her to tell people's fortunes. And as she followed them down the street - Paul and his companions, she began to mock them and call after them, and Paul turned around and commanded the spirit to leave her. And when the spirit left, as she could no longer foretell the future, it was a demonic aided ability that she had. And her owners were so angry at that, they got hold of Paul and Silas, who was with him on that occasion, dragged them into the marketplace.

A crowd gathered. They accused them of upsetting their town and turning the place upside down, and they began to beat them and flog them, it says. And then he was taken into prison where they were flogged, stripped naked and then they were flogged and they were locked up in the inner cell. That's the high security section of the prison, with their feet firmly fastened in the stocks, so there was nowhere to move. And in this kind of environment, Paul had every reason to experience panic and fear.

He was certainly in pain with the lacerations of the floggings across his naked body and Silas too. But what does it say? It says at midnight, they were praying and singing hymns to God. You can read that in Acts 16:25 This is at midnight on the day they'd been flogged and beaten and

locked up in this prison. And if things weren't bad enough at that point while they were singing and praising God instead of panic, there was praise.

Suddenly, there was a violent earthquake that rocked the prison on its foundations and the roof caved in and the walls fell out. Remember, they were locked in the stocks, so they couldn't move. Probably bits of ceiling and wall were falling down, probably hitting some of them, and the jailer came running to his prison and realized that in the turmoil, the prisoners had probably run away somewhere and got free. He took his sword to kill himself, because otherwise the penalty for losing a prison was so severe he would have been executed anyway; and they probably would've done it the most painful way he could think of. So, in order to die as painless as he might, he took his sword to kill himself and commit suicide, when Paul said, hey, don't do that, we're still here. We're having a praise meeting, come and join us. And the man ran in and said, what must I do to be saved?

And Paul, quick as a flash, said, I don't know what you're talking about, you may be talking about being saved from the Roman authorities, but whatever it is, here's the answer. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. He led the jailer to Christ, he said this applies to your family and the jailer went home, got his family. They came back, they were saved, they were all baptized, they joined the church.

And Paul says, what you've seen in me, what you've learned from me, you do. Because then you'll see the God of peace that has been with me, will be with you. I've been in all kinds of conflicts, all kinds of trouble, all kinds of trauma. You've seen it right in Philippi when I was

there with you. But this isn't the prerogative that belongs just to an apostle, this isn't the prerogative that belongs to certain people. He says, this is the God who lives in you. This is the peace that you can experience.

The problem with many of us is, we never want to let go, to give things to God and leave them with him and say, Lord, I'm going to live in this situation, I'm going to live in these circumstances, but I'm going to do so knowing that you are the one who's going to work out your purposes here. And that's why I say, I've learned to be content whatever the situation. I've been well-fed, he says. I've been hungry. I've been in every kind of situation. I've been clothed, I've been naked, but I've learned this. It doesn't matter what's happening to me.

What happens most, is what is happening in me. You can't control what's happening to you. But you can control what's happening in you. And what I've learned to do, says Paul, is bring Jesus Christ into every situation. So I'm not saying to you, folks, you stand firm simply by human discipline. You women make it up with each other. Just do it! He's not saying that. He's saying, this is in the Lord. You stand firm in the Lord. You agree with each other in the Lord. You learn to rejoice in the Lord. You experience this peace which passes understanding.

Let me ask you this morning. Do you know anything about that in your own life? You know, it could well be that's some of you here this morning. It's very, very likely that is some of us here, this morning, and you say, well, I'm here because I really want to find God. I want to know God, but I don't know him yet. You can know him.

You know, week after week people come to know Christ here in this place. And it may well be that there are some of you here this morning, and you say this is so foreign to anything I have experienced myself. Well, that can change right now this morning. You say, Lord Jesus Christ, I recognize that you're outside of my life, there's a barrier between us. It's a barrier of my sin and I thank you that you dealt with that on the cross. You died for me, but you have risen again that you might come by your holy spirit to live in me and by your Holy Spirit to implant in me all the resources I need, to live in the midst of whatever conflict and difficulties that life may throw at me.

Don't bury your head in the sand and wish your problems to go away but turn your mind to what is true and set your mind on what is true. And by the way, how you think is important in the New Testament. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, think about what is true. The mind is the initial avenue of spiritual experience, so that we understand and think correctly about these things. You can experience this in reality.

I saw a slogan one day outside a church and it was a good one. It said, you're not what you think you are, but what you think, you are! Does that make sense? You are not what you think you are, what you think, you are! You are what you think.

We know that's true about our eating. You are what you eat. That's why every time you go to buy something now, you'll see a breakdown of the carbohydrate, the fat, the protein, etc content and we read it. Usually, the fat content because we are what we eat.

Everything you see of me I originally ate so that's how I got that there, I wasn't born this way. And one thing I know about myself that you don't know, everything about me tastes good. I know that because I ate it in the first place.

I originally ate the contents of my finger and we are what we eat. Some of you have been eating a lot. But more significantly, we are what we think. As a man thinks in his heart, we're told in the book of Proverbs, So is he.

Now, says Paul, if you're going to experience this, it's not just that somehow at the end of a meeting, you go and pray with somebody and that solves it. You have got to change your thinking, so that every day you're saying Lord Jesus, in every part of my life today, I want you to reign. I want you to fill every part of my life today. It doesn't mean life will be easy. It just means you have resources you never had before. And the squabbles, the Euodia's and the Syntyche's. You can resolve these in the Lord.

The weakness that causes Paul to say stand firm is in the Lord. The discouragement that caused him to say rejoice is in the Lord. The peace that replaces anxiety and panic is in the Lord. You can be a Christian yet living with your mind on earthly things and you need to repent of that. Repentance actually means changing the mind. The literal word repent metanoia, meta to change, noia, nous the mind. To change your mind, and an ongoing change of mind that says every day, what is true, is that Christ is never frightened by the things that frighten me.

There may be a cat in the cupboard that is by my bed, I couldn't care if it's a crocodile. Because anything that is going to get me has to get him first. And he can handle crocodiles, she used to think. And the Lord Jesus is my security to send it to him with thanks. Do you know that kind of peace? If you don't, we'd love to help you to enter into that.