



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,
day after day, and that the people of God
were filled with joy!

Produced by Ottawa RPC to help family worship.

Friday – Philippians 4:1-7a: "In the Lord"

One of Paul's favourite descriptions of the Christian life is that we are "in the Lord". The description reminds us that once we are in God's family of faith, we can never be removed from it again: we are in Christ, and he is in us, an unbreakable bond.

Paul says that we are to stand firm in the Lord (chapter 4:1). This is a repeated command in Philippians (see chapter 1:27), and it is a firm command. Yet Paul says this with great affection: he calls the Philippians his "brothers"; he says he loves them and longs for them; he describes them as his "joy and crown". We should always remember that the commands Christ has given us, however challenging they may be, are given by the One who loves us with more affection and perfection than anyone else on earth.

Paul also tells the Philippians to agree in the Lord (verse 2): he instructs two women, Euodia and Syntyche to agree. For some reason, was a problem between them. Sadly, this can happen in the church, even among committed, godly men and women. Notice, however, that these women were not troublemakers; they were faithful servants of Christ (see verse 3) - but they had fallen out. It can happen in the church. When it does, every effort must be made for believers to reconcile, and agree again. Few things are worse for the witness of the local church than disagreement among her members.

Lastly, Paul tells the Philippians that they should rejoice in the Lord (verse 4). This doesn't mean keeping a fake smile on our faces at all times; but it means that we keep Christ in mind, and we take comfort from knowing that he will return (verse 5). When we are anxious or hurting, verse 6 tells us what to do: take it to the Lord in prayer. Doing so regularly will produce a peace in our hearts (verse 7) that cannot be found anywhere else. The place of prayer is a place of reassurance, joy and peace.

Questions

What does Paul say we are to do?

What does it mean to 'stand firm in the Lord'?

Why does Paul tell the Philippians to agree?

Paul tells them to do two things in verses 4-6, what are they?

Paul also tells them not to do something in verses 4-6, what is it?

*The notes in this series written by Rev. Philip Dunwoody (RPC).
They have been slightly modified.*

Thursday - Philippians 3:17-21: Citizens of Heaven

We've seen Paul refer to the Philippians as "citizens" once already (chapter 1:27). He does so again in chapter 4:20. The people of Philippi (not just the church members) were very proud to be Roman citizens. They had privileges and an "identity" that others would like to have had. But Paul wants the Philippian church to be most thankful for their identity as "heavenly citizens".

First, Paul says citizens of heaven look to their role models. Rome was the trend-setting city of the ancient world; the city of Philippi was like a "Rome wannabe", copying the fashion tastes and culture trends of the capital. Citizens of heaven should act like other citizens of heaven (verse 17). If there's a Christian couple who have shown you what a healthy marriage looks like, or a believer who is a great evangelist, or a great host, or a great youth leader, imitate them. One preacher says it's ok to be a copycat as long as you copy the right cat!

Secondly, Paul says heavenly citizens look forward to their future. Life for a citizen in a foreign country can be at best strange, at worst dangerous. Christians know we are citizens of heaven, only passing through a hostile world. Paul says there are "enemies" of the cross of Christ (verse 18) that we must watch out for. These may be false teachers in the church or opponents in the world. Whilst we cannot take them lightly, we know that they will not topple Christ and his church. And so, we can look forward to receiving what Jesus has promised us: glorious resurrection (verse 21)! Maybe right now you have a body full of aches and pains; maybe a horrible illness is threatening your life; maybe age or injury has slowed you down. One day, all of that will be different. We need to think about our future more often. It will be truly awesome: bodies that never grow weak or tired, a new world to explore, and a wonderful Saviour to enjoy. Our heavenly citizenship comes with a guarantee of a glorious future.

Questions

What is a citizen?

What is a role model?

What do citizens of heaven do?

Why is it important to look to the future and heaven?

Monday – Philippians 2:19-30: A Few Good Men.

So far in chapter 2, Paul has laid out the need for humble believers who love the gospel. He's already given his readers the supreme example of Jesus; now he gives two other great examples: Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Paul had first met Timothy during his second missionary journey (see Acts 16:1ff.). After Paul left Philippi, Timothy probably stayed for a while as a temporary preacher and pastor, before later re-joining Paul. However, when Paul writes to the Philippians, Timothy is obviously with Paul in Rome (see chapter 1:1, chapter 2:19). The Philippians would have loved to have Timothy back to minister to them. But Paul can't send him yet: he says in verse 20 that he has "no one like" Timothy. He was a unique blessing to Paul, a son in the Christian faith (verse 20). Unlike others who had fallen away (verse 21), Timothy had "proven" himself to Paul (verse 22) as a humble servant of Christ.

Paul also commends a man called Epaphroditus. Paul describes him as a "brother", a "fellow worker and fellow soldier", and a "messenger and minister". Paul's words in verses 26-27 suggest that Epaphroditus had set out from Philippi to Rome to visit Paul, probably with gifts for him from the Philippian church. On the way, Epaphroditus fell ill. Rather than turn back, or stop to recover, he pressed on, knowing how much it would mean to Paul to receive the gifts of the Philippians. Epaphroditus may not have been a preacher and teacher like Timothy, but he still performed invaluable service: he encouraged Paul in prison, even risking his own life to do so.

We need more young people like Timothy and Epaphroditus in the church. What will you do with your gifts? Will you humbly learn from older Christians? Will you encourage them? Will you be content to do the "small jobs", until, after training and maturity, you are given bigger tasks in the church of Jesus? What can you do this week to humbly serve a member or members of your local church the way Timothy and Epaphroditus served Paul and the Philippians?

Questions:

Who was Timothy?

What does Paul say about Timothy?

Who was Epaphroditus and what had he done?

What can we learn from these two men?

Tuesday – Philippians 3:1-11: Joyful Loss and Joyful Gain.

There are some things that Christians should be joyful to live without; others that we can be joyful to live with.

Paul describes his own experience of joyful loss in verses 3-7. Before he became a Christian, Paul (Saul) was someone who thought he had it all: a top-flight religious education, a perfect record of obeying man-made religious laws, a pure, "good" person. This is what he is describing in verses 4-6. He was a "Hebrew of Hebrews", he ticked all the boxes that the Jewish religion had, he was the best of the best... But he says in verse 7 that he lost it all - and he's glad about it! Paul had been trusting in his own "goodness" as salvation, without realising that he could do nothing about his own sins. Today, people still want to trust in themselves: being a "good Protestant", or a "good Catholic", or just a "good human being", who recycles, or gives to charity, or never murders anyone, or does their bit for the local community. Paul describes all of this as "rubbish" in verse 8 - in fact, the word could be "dung". The Bible says we cannot save ourselves. Everything that we're tempted to rely on, we will someday lose. We can take nothing with us out of this life.

But then Paul describes his joyful gain. In verse 8, he says everything is a loss "compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord". In verse 9, he describes how he now does not trust in his own goodness, but instead trusts in the goodness - the "righteousness" - of Jesus Christ, which he has received as a free gift. What we gain in Christ, by faith, is a perfect record of sinlessness - past, present and future. This leads to the greatest gain of all, which Paul describes in verse 11: "resurrection from the dead". If God took away everything else from you, could you still rejoice in this: that Jesus Christ has taken away your sin, and someday, you will rise again to live with him forever?! What else could we possibly need?

Questions:

Who does Paul call 'dogs' and why?

What does Paul's background tell us about him?

What does Paul say is the most important thing in his life?

What is the most important thing in your life?

Wednesday – Philippians 3:12-16: Press On With Joy.

Healthy beings grow and mature. Parents will look for markers, every few weeks or months, that young children are growing; farmers look for it in their livestock; entrepreneurs look for it in their profit margins. The Christian life is no different: it is not about standing still, but about pressing forward, seeing growth. Paul is eager to see the Philippian believers mature, grow, press forward in their faith. But how do we know if this is happening in our Christian lives?

First of all, Paul says that maturing believers know we're not "there" yet - that is, we know we're not as mature as we will someday be. Paul said in chapter 3:10 that he wants to "know" Christ and to "become like him" in every way - but he says in verse 12 that he knows he's not there yet.

And so, secondly, Paul presses on, verse 14. Maybe you've seen the sprinters at the Olympics lean and stretch out at the end of the race in an effort to finish first. Paul is telling us that he presses on in his faith with every fibre of his being - it takes effort.

It is not "unspiritual" to say that the Christian life is often just about getting on with things: dishes need washed, rubbish bins need emptied, homework needs to be done. But as Christians we have the great assurance that our faithful plodding and pressing on is taking us somewhere: closer and closer to "the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (verse 14). We're going to be with our Saviour! We're going to be glorified in heaven with him and all his people! Does this not motivate us to stretch and strain, a little bit more, day by ordinary day?

Paul says in verse 15 that this mindset is a mark of maturity. If we don't have it, Paul says God can change us - or "reveal" our faulty thinking. God reveals things in his Word. If we don't find ourselves motivated to "press on", perhaps we should turn to the Scriptures, consider Christ in all his glory, and remind ourselves of the wonderful promises he has made for our glorious future with him.

Questions

What does Paul say he is pressing on to get?

What do you think Paul is talking about when he says that he is forgetting the past?