

Demonstrating the Gospel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 March 2023

Preacher: Ali Sewell

[0 : 0 0] thanks very much Ross if you've got a Bible in front of you or nearby it would be worth keeping it open at that chapter, Philippians chapter 4 as we look through that together this is our penultimate week in this great letter to the Philippians which we've been making our way through we're into the final chapter this week and we'll finish that off next week and sometimes there can be a slight feeling when we get to the end of Paul's letters we can perhaps feel a little bit overwhelmed perhaps all the different points that seem to be pulled together, it can sometimes be a bit tricky to recognise the big idea or to feel the overall message of the passage that holds things together but there is, I want us to grasp in this passage a kind of unity, there is something that holds all of these verses together Paul speaks about various different topics in these verses but it's all tied together because really this is what it looks like this is what it looks like in various areas to put into practice what Paul has been speaking about in this letter just a very very kind of quick overview or reminder of some of the things we've seen we've seen Paul lay out this kind of big picture of active gospel partnership that the church is to share and to be involved in

Paul's spoken about having that the mind of Christ in that and that means serving others rather than just ourselves we've spoken or Paul has reminded us how our hope is in Christ and his work alone not in our own efforts and as Ross reminded us earlier what we saw last week that emphasis on having a future focus that together we're to be a people who keep our eyes fixed on the prize that the promise of restoration as Jesus returns that God has promised that we live this day in light of that day to come and so as we've been kind of working through this letter we've seen a number of these kind of huge concepts and as we kind of come into land as it were here Paul brings these things down to earth by showing how they play out in the nitty gritty of day to day life two kind of major areas here which are highlighted our relationships and our attitude we're going to call them two areas where Paul gives examples of what it means to stand firm thus in the Lord as he says in verse one two areas where Paul says it's vital that our lives and our church are shaped by and reflect well the gospel of Jesus Christ which has been at the very heart of this letter so we're going to look at both of those things and then thirdly we'll see at the end kind of Paul's reminder on the input that we need that the gospel focus that we need to maintain in order to live all of this out okay so the first thing then that Paul focuses on here the first way

Paul wants all that he's spoken about to be worked out in the Philippian church and to be worked out in our local church here in Haddington and the local church wherever it is found is that Paul calls for gospel unity demonstrated in relationships gospel unity demonstrated in relationships let me read verse two and three again I entreat Yodia and I entreat Synthicae to agree in the Lord yes I ask you also true companion help these women who have labored 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 it's perhaps good to stop for a minute and imagine the shock for the first hearers of this letter imagine you're sitting there at your local church in Philippi it's been an exciting morning as there is a letter from the apostle Paul it's been brought all the way especially to you it's been read out for the first time it's brilliant it's life changing it contains all those kind of truths that we've just been reminded of and then suddenly toward the close of the letter these two individuals

Yodia and Synthicae are called out by name two people that everyone knew perhaps everyone was kind of aware weren't getting on all that well that they are specifically kind of called out and implored by Paul to come together and to be united I imagine you could have heard a pin drop as these verses are read out for the first time and it maybe makes us think well why did Paul specifically mention these people it's a bit awkward isn't it it's a bit direct why is he so specific in this public letter to the church and really the reason for that has to be because Paul recognises this is something that is so important that actually this relational issue is a gospel issue one of the big themes that has been running through this letter as we've said is partnership fellowship togetherness standing side by side that that is the the result of that is the fruit of the gospel and so for Paul it's not just kind of preferable but it's essential that a church built on the gospel living a life worthy of the gospel is demonstrating that gospel in their relationships and that means having this unity together as a church and so we see straight away and we need to face up to how important that is it's worth highlighting as well what Paul does and doesn't mean here or what Paul is and isn't saying here notice how Paul doesn't kind of pick a side

Paul doesn't say it's not about who's right and who's wrong Paul goes out of his way to say they've both been fellow workers with him he speaks positively of both of them I think it's fair to say this can't be a theological dispute because Paul would have written to give the answer to that certainly if someone was spreading something untrue about the gospel Paul would be very clear on that and we see that elsewhere in his letters really the situation here is two people two people in good standing in the church and yet for whatever reason not in good standing with others obviously here not just a disagreement but a disagreement causing division perhaps one of those all too common events where something in the past perhaps something significant maybe just something small maybe just a personality thing has been allowed to fester and to grow that's the situation that Paul is writing into and what's his solution well it's not to say again this is important it's not to say look you two and everyone else in fact you need to agree on absolutely everything the church needs to be this completely kind of uniform mass of people with all share the same opinion on every single idea look at what he says in verse 2 that they are to agree in the Lord and actually what Paul literally writes there is that they are to have the same mind or they are to think the same in the Lord

[7 : 23] Paul uses there the exact same expression the exact same words that he's used back in verse 2 of chapter 2 that time it's translated in our Bibles complete my joy by having the same mind having the same love being in full accord and of one mind this idea of having the same mind in the Lord in chapter 2 Paul then goes on to say that mind we're to share that allows us to think of others above ourselves is the mind of Jesus who humbled himself for us and if you remember back there perhaps one of the most famous sections in this letter chapter 2 this incredible description of the gospel of Jesus humbling himself Jesus' descent even to the point of death even death on a cross for us that we might be reconciled to God through which Jesus is now glorified that incredible picture description of the gospel that is what

Paul is deliberately referring the church back to here in chapter 4 that is the grounds for this unity that is the solution Paul says to Lurea and Syntyche to have that gospel mindset that means whatever's happened in the past whether it's that gradual cooling of relationships or whether it is one that has hurt the other that actually in the gospel as they have that same mind what draws them together is stronger than what separates them that grace God has for them that grace that has united them through Christ to him is also a grace that they are to have for one another the truth though it is the gospel that brings this unity and the church is to display that gospel unity in its relationships and Paul kind of strengthens emphasizes this point by pressing home the reality the truth of the connection they have they have a common purpose he says as they both labored side by side with Paul and in the church together we need to be united as God has given us as a local congregation a job to do and also Paul says they have this common destination they are those whose names are written in the book of life that means those who will be ultimately together for eternity one commentator puts it this way there is a heavenly reality about the local church and there are no divisions in heaven again Paul is leaning on that that future focus that we spoke about last week where all God's people will be together and again calling us to live this day in light of that day gospel unity demonstrated in relationships that's something so easy to say and yet so challenging to live out that there might be people who are part of this church who come to mind where you feel that distance or that disunity perhaps and yet it is such a vital thing for us to speak about

Paul highlights it in this letter for that reason because theologically and practically it is such an important aspect of this church that can't be brushed over in Philippi and again we've been saying all the way through this letter and Ross mentioned earlier this church in Philippi is a really good church we've been saying through this series here is a church for us to aspire to here is a model church and that makes it all the more telling doesn't it that even here even in this church that seems to have everything got together still Paul needs to give this warning you know a church where things feel really positive can so easily be blown off course by something like this and so first as we meet this morning after the service thinking about moving forward as a church thinking about this kind of fully sanctioned charge process that we've been speaking about really encouraging times moving forward it's so important again that we remember and it's so good that we are reminded this morning that we move forward with gospel unity demonstrated in our relationships with the overarching truth of the gospel being displayed in our unity together that's something we could talk about a lot longer isn't it we'll wrap up simply with that encouragement to think to pray about if there are people that you need to speak to but also to see here how Paul calls others to get involved as well verse 3 you also true companion help these women we don't know who that true companion is but there is that call though isn't there for others for us a church as a whole to be proactive in helping these relationships that's not an invitation to be kind of nosy and stick our nosy everywhere here and everywhere but it is that call to be prayerfully considering where are the areas where we need to wisely help in this way again that kind of key to Philippians as we've said right from the beginning we're all in this together that kind of high school musical was far more theologically astute than you'd ever thought it was and the key aspect of that the key outworking of that here is the gospel applied to our relationships and gospel unity demonstrated in our relationships so there's the first kind of nitty gritty outworking of all that Paul has been speaking about our relationships what Paul speaks about next the next kind of visible sign of working this out is a whole bunch of things which really we could kind of group together

I think and we could call our attitude Paul says there should be gospel unity demonstrated in our relationships and gospel joy demonstrated in our attitudes Paul begins this next section of our passage with another key theme in this letter verse 4 he says rejoice rejoice that is a thread that runs right through this letter to the Philippians chapter 1 verse 18 in that I rejoice chapter 2 verse 17 I am glad and rejoice chapter 3 verse 1 finally my brothers rejoice again here chapter 4 verse 4 rejoice in the Lord always again I will say rejoice this is a letter which is full of joy Paul emphasizes that because of the gospel because of what God has done for us in Jesus because we can now have a relationship with him because that brings eternal security that he has won for us and it's his work not ours that the result of that is genuine joy for those trusting in

Jesus and as we said really the point of these verses 4 down to 7 are that that joy should be demonstrated in our attitudes it should be demonstrated in the type of people that we are and the type of people that we're known to be Paul first says we should be known as reasonable people we sometimes use that word reasonable as a fairly weak word I suppose don't we we say I'll be reasonable as if it's the kind of the bare minimum of standard the bare minimum standard of behaviour we might expect from someone actually the word Paul uses here is much more positive than that it's a kind of a patient gentleness if you would describe it or picture it you'd picture the kind of person that you would want to spend time with this is the kind of person that you would trust this is the kind of person you would come to in challenging times Paul's point is that the gospel shouldn't make us a spiky or awkward people but as we share in that humble mind of Christ which allows us to consider others before ourselves because Christ has considered us before himself well that is the source of this reasonableness this reasonableness is living that out is demonstrating the gospel in our attitudes being the kind of people in our church and in our community who are known as those people can approach and speak to whether in challenging times or who would celebrate with them or who would commiserate with them being known as reasonable patient gentle people and what else does Paul speak about here in these verses he goes on to speak about anxiety again there is a huge topic isn't it that's something we could talk about for a long time a huge issue but again Paul says that the joy of the gospel should make a difference in our attitude in terms of anxiety we so often think of anxiety as something that simply happens to us something that is completely beyond our control and absolutely some people are more prone to be anxious than other people are some people suffer from clinical or medical anxiety which is a medical condition we're not in any way here wanting to be naive or condemning about that in any way and yet Paul here is clear that an approach to life which is living out the gospel which is taking all that Paul has said about what

[17:02] Jesus has done which has this mind of Christ and is then working that out in really tangible ways that actually to live this out makes a difference in terms of anxiety that actually when challenging situations arise we don't need to instantly click into anxiety that that doesn't become our kind of default state the thing we're known for instead Paul wants us to bring the truths of the gospel to bear and so in these verses Paul doesn't just say guys just quit your worrying if you could just stop that put that away don't do that anymore no he surrounds that call with gospel truths he introduces what he says there at the end of verse six by saying the lord is at hand before he he makes he tells people not to be anxious verse seven after he said that he said and the peace of god which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus the peace of god there is not just kind of nice calm feelings as if god is going to kind of play us a relaxing piano soundtrack which will chill us out a bit no Paul isn't primarily talking about a feeling that we experience but he's speaking about the objective reality that we have peace with god through Jesus through the gospel the creator god who we have rejected who we have turned away from who we were made ourselves enemies of well now through Jesus we have peace we have relationship with that holy god can you see what Paul is doing he's saying if this is what we believe to be true that god is near and that through Jesus we have peace with that god that our biggest need is fulfilled that he is our heavenly father that we can look forward even to eternity with great confidence as we said last week if that is true and it is well then surely our anxieties fade as we have that confidence in him and in fact not just fades but our attitude flips as our first response in potentially anxious situations

Paul says is that we would turn to god in prayer that we would pray with thanksgiving that we'd give thanks for this gospel truth and we'd see the difficulties in our lives in light of the god who is there and the god with whom we have peace through Jesus and Paul says that is what guards our hearts and minds that is what allows us not to be anxious about things and again Paul's point as we draw near to the conclusion of this letter is that just like our relationships our attitude should be reflecting something of the truth of the gospel that our characteristic behavior we might say is that we are people who are rejoicing that we're known by those around to be people who are reasonable generous gentle as rather than being anxious we're able to have a posture of gratitude and all of this isn't just because we're kind of sucking it up and trying really hard no all of this is because we know there is a god who loves us a god who doesn't take away our concerns but a god we can bring our concerns to and that actually as we live that out in a world full of sadness a world full of selfishness a world full of worry then actually as we live that out in the strength of the gospel the truth of the gospel is demonstrated and others are invited into that so it's a challenge for us to live that out it's not easy but it is also this great invitation wherever you stand with god this morning whether you are a Christian have been for a long time perhaps you're still asking questions perhaps you're kind of skeptical not sure at all as we read this you see the kind of attractiveness of that attitude that description there in verses 4-7 if you think you know what

I'd love that to characterize my life I want joy I want to rejoice and then again this passage is holding out that invitation there to come to god or to come back to god to accept that peace which is possible by trusting in jesus that peace that god has made possible the peace that god has opened a way to and in that to find that gospel joy that is able to bring rejoicing in all circumstances because it's found on that solid foundation of what jesus has done and really it is this gospel foundation then that paul returns to as we finish this passage this morning verses 8 and 9 if we want gospel unity demonstrated in our relationships if we want gospel joy demonstrated in our attitudes well the key that the power source to that really paul says is that we have to keep a gospel focus as our priority now we've already seen in both points so far haven't we paul is pointing us back to the gospel as we said that is the foundation that is the ground for unity it is the gospel that brings joy paul really finishes off here by calling all of us to saturate ourselves in that gospel so that we're able to live that out as gospel people as a gospel church let me read again verses 8 and 9 paul says this finally brothers whatever is true whatever is honorable 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 what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things and the god of peace will be with you paul gives there two final instructions in these final verses the first one think about these things again the mind and what we think about how we think has been a repeated emphasis through this letter the question is what here is is what is shaping our minds and what do we spend our time thinking about is it that which is honorable just pure lovely commendable excellent praiseworthy ultimately these are kind of gospel words aren't they these are words that describe god are we focused on things that point us to him and for that to be the case paul is really realistic here that we need to be deliberate about that paul uses the imperative case there it's a command think to actively focus our minds on these things rather than simply whatever the world kind of pushes into our field of view and if paul's instruction to think about what we think about to be deliberate and disciplined in that if that was necessary in the first century i think surely even more so now i was reading recently about the the uniqueness i suppose of our internet streaming social media age the author wrote this that audio and visual and video content are not only continually accessible but also targeted to find us even when we're trying to keep our attention to something else i don't know if you recognize that but it's true isn't it i can't be the only person who thought i was going away to read a book or even the bible or do something useful and then found half an hour later i'm still looking at my phone i'm still looking at whatever companies or advertising wants me to think about rather than thinking about that that points me toward god and this way this kind of passage hangs together is as we spend our time is that what we spend our time thinking about is what is going to shape our relationships and our attitude we're constantly being formed or shaped or

nudged by the world around us and if we're honest we're kidding ourselves if we think that just spending an hour or so together once a week on a sunday that this will be that the gospel will be the primary influence on our lives if we're not continuing to focus on if we're not continuing to deliberately think about what is good what what is gospel what points us to god throughout the rest of the week it's important we take what paul says here seriously that we think about these things what does that actually look like hundreds of different ways aren't there there are countless sermons or podcasts available to us there's never been more availability of christian books or blogs although make sure they're good ones because there's plenty of rubbish ones there as well we do live in this time of kind of unprecedented distraction but also unprecedented opportunity but also making sure we don't just forget what we we might call the timeless essentials the primary means that god has given us of his word the bible and coming to him in prayer as we spend time reading god's word as we spend time in prayer as we commit and and discipline ourselves to do that then we are committing to think to to focus on that which is best of all most worthy of praise of god himself and also remembering here as we said time and time again remembering this is a a corporate letter and this is a whole church letter this is a whole church activity it's encouraging one another in this and that actually we would prioritize that they are gathering together as god's people to help each other think on what is good whether that is here on a sunday whether that is community groups on a wednesday evening whether that is other times together whether that is making the effort to get together in smaller groups throughout the week and that together we would help one another keep on thinking on the gospel so that is what shapes us to keep thinking think about these things as paul says and then the final point paul makes here is that as well as think he says we are to practice final verse verse nine what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things and the god of peace will be with you this instruction to practice is really so appropriate in this letter which we've seen has been so much about an active faith about working out our salvation about living worthy of the gospel that actually we don't want to shy away from the fact that that takes effort that that takes engagement as we've said again repeatedly that is not effort to earn our salvation and that is not effort to earn god's favor our only hope there is in what christ has done but it's in light of what christ has done that that we are motivated to give everything to give our whole lives to put in the effort to live as god's people and it's often been said we don't drift toward holiness it is it's going against the flow it takes practice it takes effort and we talked this morning about relationships within the church we talked about our attitude in day-to-day lives those are our challenging topics to talk about and these are our massive areas of life aren't they and again simply having looked through this book of philippians and as we finish that next week it's not going to be as if a flip a switch kind of magically flicks and all of those things will be sorted oh we've looked through this book we are now perfect you know kind of gospel people it takes that effort it takes that practice and yet paul is reminding us that the resources we need to live that out to live as god's people are here in this letter about the gospel are in all that we have learned

received heard seen from paul and then to work that out in real life to be this united church striving together for the gospel the call that the challenge for us to think of this morning is that we would be thinking on these things and that we would be practicing these things and that we would have the gospel first and foremost in our minds and in our efforts so that we can live as god's people for his glory let's pray together please and please we