



+

This week we spent our time in Philippians 4v4-9 and noted initially that the Christians are facing opposition as they trust in Jesus. Paul's command for them though that sets the agenda for the entire passage is that they always to be those who 'rejoice in the Lord' (v4). Easier said than done! He's not simply telling them to rejoice though, but rather to rejoice in the Lord. The problem with problems however is that they have a way of overshadowing and affecting everything. Thus Paul's foundational answer, as we rejoice 'in the Lord' is that Jesus is bigger than whatever is going on.

We must be a people who increasingly preach that truth to our hearts, because so easily we forget it.

Then Paul gives a three 'hurdles' to rejoicing:

1. gentleness (v5)

Usually our tendency in the midst of hardship is to not be gentle but rather harsh with people. However, Paul urges gentleness because the Lord is near. Perhaps that's a comfort because it means you are not alone and can rejoice, or perhaps it's that we don't have to retaliate because God has seen and one-day justice will be served.

2. anxiety (v6)

Fundamentally anxiety comes from us trusting the wrong things. Which means that Paul's command in this verse is challenging. He is aware of the fact that anything can bring us anxiety and yet his solution is simple (in theory!). The solution is that we pray. Problem is we can be slow to pray because we trust the wrong thing - we trust in ourselves.

Perhaps that's why thanksgiving is in there? Because in the midst of the panic if we can remember to press pause and take stock and give thanks for what we do know, then anxiety can be perhaps less of an issue.

3. thought-life (v8)

Increasingly we need to be those who trust in the right things and so in v8 Paul urges us to change what we think about. What seems most likely is that Paul is using a common idea of wisdom from the time and redefining it for the church. In the context of Philippians Jesus is the perfectly true-noble-right-pure (etc) one so as we focus on him (rather than trying to distract ourselves or forget our anxieties) it is then that we may find we are more able to 'rejoice in the Lord always'.

Here are some questions to start your group off

- What things make you most anxious? How do you generally deal with them?

How have you found your anxiety levels over the past 12 weeks or so? What things are you anxious about?

- Do you think phone or Internet usage helps or hinders anxiety? In what sense?

- Are you one who is able to rejoice in the Lord always? Why do you think we struggle so much to do this?

- Why do you think Paul talks about gentleness here and how might that relate to our rejoicing in the Lord?

- What is Paul's antidote to anxiety? Why does he focus on these things? What does he promise? Does this ring true with you?

- Why do you think Paul wants the Philippians to change what they think about and reflect upon? Have a read through the song about Jesus in chapter 2. What elements here can lead us to rejoicing and reducing our anxiety?