



Think Nice Thoughts 1

Phil 4:1-9

Today is the most exciting day in the Christian calendar, because it's the day when we remember and rejoice in a risen Saviour, Praise Him! And we remembered this morning that when we trusted Christ we in effect died. We died to the world; we died to sin. We were submerged into His death. We were dyed with His dye. And we have been raised with Him to new life. I didn't say much about the Romans passage this morning. It's a good example of where it's better to use the word baptism as immersion rather than baptism. Let me read it with baptism substituted:

1 What shall we say, then? Should we continue to live in sin so that God's grace will increase? 2 Certainly not! We have died to sin — how then can we go on living in it? 3 For surely you know that when we were immersed into union with Christ Jesus, we were immersed into union with his death. 4 By our immersion, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life

Does this passage refer to water baptism – almost certainly not to my mind. As with many religious words, the NT writers used these words routinely rather than religiously. Immersion as in the process of dyeing causes the dyed cloth to take on the properties of the dye. That's why Paul uses it to describe the process of salvation. When we trusted Christ, we were immersed in Him, we lost our own properties – our sin, and when we pulled out of the dye we became like Him. Now can you see how that passage works? Water baptism signifies quite accurately what happened to us when we became believers.

Therefore we live His risen life. What is His risen life? We know from our study of Philippians that one day our body will be like His – risen, glorious. We will be with Him eternally. But what about now? We have still been made alive in Christ – we are living a new life. So what is that new life about. In these few short verses in Philippians 4, we are pointed in the right direction.

A new life means a new attitude to life. When I was a teacher, I used to have to deal with people who had failed their exams. Many had richly deserved it. Others had very little self-confidence and that showed in their inability to pass exams. There was nothing wrong with their academic ability. Both kinds of people had completely the wrong attitude. Part of their learning process wasn't learning how to do Geography, or even how to pass exams, but having a positive attitude of who they were and what they could do.

Psychologists call it PMA – positive mental attitude. **Cogito, ergo sum** (Descartes) "I think, therefore I am". Descartes philosophy rationalist rather than Christian but actually all he was doing was outlining an idea woven into human existence. What we are and what we achieve is strongly linked to who we think we are and what we think we can do. There are some things that are mentally and physically impossible, but there are many things we think we can or can't do that are possible.

When we came to Christ something humanly impossible happened (bearing in mind to God nothing is impossible) our natures changed and now we live a new life. What's that new life about – to be like Jesus. "But that's impossible, how can I be like Jesus" Well, that's what is expected of us and Jesus has given us a risen life and the Holy Spirit to make it happen.

On a practical level, Paul's discussion here is about a Positive Mental Attitude. We are the people of God, so our attitude to God, the world, to people and to our fellow believers can and should reflect who we are in Him. Actually that has been the theme in the whole of the letter as we have observed. As I said last week, it all boils down to chapter 2 verse 5 "*your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus*"

There are a variety of points here that show how a humble and obedient attitude works in the context of our Christian lives – if we are to stand firm as Paul puts it in verse 1

◆ Try to agree

2 Euodia and Syntyche, please, I beg you, try to agree as sisters in the Lord. 3 And you too, my faithful partner, I want you to help these women; for they have worked hard with me to spread the gospel, together with Clement and all my other fellow-workers, whose names are in God's book of the living.

Two squabbling women. We know nothing of their squabbling but we all know that conflict eats away at Christian fellowship. Apart from begging them to stop, he calls on his faithful partner to help them sort out their differences. We don't know who he's referring to. Is it to Timothy who was bringing the letter, or someone else? Whatever, the risen life means that disagreement and squabbling is not part of it and we are not called to be Euodia and Syntyche but to be faithful partners.

Back in the 1920's the leading fundamentalist preacher in Texas was J. Frank Norris. Norris loved conflict. He thrived on it. He ran an on-going verbal war with the Southern Baptist Convention because of its liberalism. (It was more conservative back then than it is now!) One of his sermons was entitled, "The Ten Worst Devils in Fort Worth, Names Given." The sermon lived up to its title. One of the "devils" mentioned in the sermon was the Roman Catholic mayor of Fort Worth. After Norris said the mayor wasn't fit to be a manager of a hog-pen, a friend of the mayor's threatened Norris by phone. Not getting satisfaction, he came over to Norris' office in the church. After a heated argument, Norris pulled a revolver out of his desk and shot the man dead. The jury let him off the hook by ruling it was self-defence, but it didn't help Rev. Norris' reputation.

Conflict destroys. It's easier to say that before there's conflict in a church than when it's there. These women had been faithful in God's work and they were just obviously not seeing sense in such a way that they needed the Apostle's reprimand. Never let conflict get that far. Not only is this the exhortation of Paul, but of Jesus and I know we have tried to follow the principles of Matthew 18 here.

◆ Be joyful

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice!! What a well know verse this is. What's a great antidote to grumbling and arguing – praising God! Why? Because it puts everything into perspective. When we realise how we got to being who we are today then it is Jesus. When we truly worship, then the pressures of our human relationships get thrown into perspective. What miserable grumblers Euodia and Syntyche must have been! How they can't have worshipped properly! How empty their rejoicing must have been.

Why is rejoicing so important? It's central to worship. Worship isn't something we kind of do because we are Christians. Praise and rejoicing is a fundamental part of it because it turns the focus from us to God and what we see straight away is His grace towards us and the cross immediately comes into focus and puts everything into perspective.

Today has been a day of rejoicing for us. Jesus is risen, He's risen indeed. Let's allow that rejoicing to colour our thinking about one another. If we do have those seeds of grumbling or even conflict within us or amongst us, let's put them into perspective. We're not called to live fallen lives, but risen lives. Let's make peace with those we are not at peace with, let's be peacemakers "faithful partners" where we see these problems.

◆ Let your gentleness be evident to all.

5 Show a gentle attitude towards everyone. The Lord is coming soon.

I guess the opposite to conflict is gentleness. In the olden days the word meekness was used which is a bit nearer the meaning of the Greek. Meekness just goes a bit further than just being gentle – it also means humble too – a major theme of this letter. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Is meek weak? I remind you of the story of the cleansing of the Temple. Was meek weak there?

The GNB for a change gives us our convenient word – gentle attitude. The opposite of gentle isn't

strong or assertive, although that's often how the world perceives it - look at a list of antonyms for meek or gentle. The opposite of gentle surely is rough.

As you know Michael and I often go to see the ships docking in the harbour. They are thousands of tonnes of iron floating in the water. But to get them on to the dockside, they need the help of tugs. The tugs are very powerful, but berthing a ship is a slow and gentle process. If the tugs push too hard, the ship will go crashing into the dockside and to hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of damage to the ship and the dockside. The only way to do it safely is to use the massive power of the tugs to push and pull the ship in a way that it gently touches the dockside.

Gentleness is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of power. If we can deal with one another and with the world gently and lovingly, then we win hearts and minds and honour Christ. Rough treatment of people is usually because we want to assert our will over other people. They don't do what we want - so we make them.

But look at Jesus - he loved and cared for the people he came into contact with them - he healed them, He taught them. But that didn't mean He ignored wrong. It didn't mean He did not speak truth when He had to. It did not mean that He was uncontroversial. It didn't mean that he failed to show anger. But the difference was that when His words were harsh, they weren't to assert Himself, but to bring people to His Father. Ironically, sometimes the most meek action you can do for anyone is to say "no, that's wrong - you can't do that", to resist evil. In the end the worse abuse you can inflict on any person is to leave them to remain in their sin because you don't want to upset them.

As you know, my wife goes to physiotherapy. She has now found a very kind physiotherapist. He listens carefully to her. He's very gentle. But he and she understands that in order to help her shoulder, the movements he does with her shoulder are painful, however gentle he is. But the kind thing isn't to leave the problem. But to gently deal with it.

That's what Jesus did when He spoke truth to the Pharisees and cleansed the temple. They didn't like it, but His gentleness was evident to all. He wasn't the Messiah who wanted to have a violent crusade to rid Israel of wrongdoing, but to deal with truth. Telling the truth is always painful - but there is a gentle way of doing it, or a rough way. Avoiding speaking truth is not an option.

What's gentle and what's rough. The nicest thing you can do to anyone is point them to Jesus - that's real gentleness. The principle is love - putting their needs before your own to win them over and win them to Christ.

I think that helps us understand the next phrase "The Lord is coming soon." Life is too short and time is too short to cause strife and make enemies. We need to win people. Win them for Christ. Win over our brothers and sisters in Christ. The time is short and there's much to do. Let's get our attitude right. Let's have a gentle attitude because it is a mark of our strength that we can manoeuvre people towards Jesus rather than crash them further into conflict with God or us.

Prayer.

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