



## Think Nice Thoughts 2

Phil 4:6-23

When I was a teacher, one of the most important things to look at with students who were coping with failure was at their attitude. Too often many of them had started to develop a “can’t do” attitude. Sometimes it was their lack of confidence, sometimes the discouragement of others or often a mixture of factors. The end result was their attitude that they were likely to fail became a self-fulfilling prophecy – and they failed.

I remember talking last time about what psychologists call it PMA – positive mental attitude. If we think we’re failures, then we fail. Part of sports psychology is the same – winners think they are winners. In our morning series I started today we explored who God has made us in Christ. It’s going to be an important series for the church as we live in an age of church where we walk in bondage when we should walk in freedom, or we walk in death when we have life. We accept we are sinners and therefore failures before and live like it whereas we are saints and should live like who we are.

The long and the short of it is that attitude so often determines outcomes. Philippians as we have found is about attitude. Here were people who were keen to associate themselves with Christ and with Paul, but so often their attitude was death and bondage in relation to other believers and to the world. The words “have this attitude” are used more than once in this letter, the key one being Philippians 2:5 let this attitude be in you that was in Christ Jesus – the attitude of humility towards one another and obedience towards God – an attitude that was not self-sacrificial but being prepared to lay down one’s life for others and for the sake of the purposes of God. And it was that attitude which has brought Jesus the glory and honour that He wants us to share with Him as we become more like Him until as we read this morning He who began a good work finishes it in us.

We saw last time how being like Jesus is a challenge. But Paul says in verse 1 *“This then, dear brothers and sisters, is how you should stand firm in your life in the Lord.”* In the spirit of what I just said, we are called on to be like Jesus because it is an achievable goal. And what was that for the Philippians? Last time we saw that that worked itself out in their relationships with one another, which was a major theme in chapter 1 and early chapter 2.

### ◆ Try to agree

We are given the example of two squabbling women, Euodia and Syntyche. We saw that apart from begging them to stop, he calls on his faithful partner (whoever that was) to help them sort out their differences. We are not called to be Euodia or Syntyche but to be faithful partners.

### ◆ Be joyful

*Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice!!* It’s one of those memorable phrases of scripture. 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. If you want the right attitude, get the right perspective because worship is one of those things that makes us remember who we are in Christ.

### ◆ Let your gentleness be evident to all

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

Meek isn't weak – it's the ultimate display of strength. Another aspect of the word for gentleness used here is that it also suggests that we be considerate, fair and equitable to others. The Lord is coming soon or the Lord is near. Our lives should be tempered by that reality. Life is too short to be messing around with our relationships, to be holding grudges, to deprive people of knowing about Jesus. Our attitude to others should attract others to Him.

What else is there? The other attitude changes involve their personal attitudes. It's the sort of things we should personally be if we are to shine like stars. It kind of sums up chapters 2 and 3 and leads us to some memorable verses.

◆ Be at peace – don't worry

*6 Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. 7 And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.*

Don't worry we have a God who we can pray to. Sign on a church "Why pray when you can worry and take tranquillisers". The amazing thing about prayer is we can lay our worries and anxieties at God's feet. And we're encouraged not to be speculative about prayer. You know, we often ask hoping against hope that we'll get lucky with Go. No – it all goes the other way around – we pray asking Him with a thankful heart. Thankful?

- thankful for the blessings we don't yet see
- thankful for all the blessings we have received already
- thankful that we can pray to God
- thankful that God knows what our real need is and will deal with it.

In case you think that's at all order, we've got the next verse – deal with prayer like this and God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus. When we are prepared to rest our cares and anxieties on God and leave it there then we will know God's peace. I like the passes all understanding bit. You see, dealing with anxieties this way is stupid to the world and stupid to Christians. We often pray and still have no peace. But when we abandon to Him we get God's peace because it transcends human understanding – it doesn't make sense but it works!

My own father was one of these people where my mum was a worrier. She could have worried for Wales if that became a sport. But not Dad. "Have you prayed about it?" he would ask. "Good, then leave it with the Lord, He knows what He's doing so thinks will work out just great".

And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus. let's go to the next point that connects directly with what we've just considered.

◆ Think nice thoughts

*8 In conclusion, my brothers and sisters, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honourable. 9 Put into practice what you learnt and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you.*

Think nice thoughts. Well not quite. It's another verse on attitude. If you always seek the best things, you'll see them. If you do that which honours God, then we find both our minds and our actions in step with God and He's with us – and we know Him as the God of peace. The right attitude produces the right actions. If our attitude is to that which is positive and honouring to God, then we actually won't have any problem resting in Him. Those who walk in step with God are the ones that pray and thank God before they even see the blessing!

Being thankful is critical to prayer. How often have we prayed but never thanked God when we saw the blessing:

*A. W. Tozer: Gratitude is an offering precious in the sight of God, and it is one that the poorest of us can make and be not poorer but richer for having made it. Giving thanks in all circumstances does not mean calling evil good – nor does it nullify fighting against the injustices of this world or trying to change the world for good and for righteousness – but giving thanks in all circumstances does*

*mean looking for the goodness of God in every situation.*

The truth is that we suffer anxiety and fear because we're not walking in step with God. We're doing our own thing, we are not walking according to His will, so we don't know His mind. Therefore our prayer is not confident and we won't know peace.

You see how it all connects. The right attitude brings us the peace of God which passes all understanding. Otherwise, there is no peace, and we experience all the hopelessness and fear of the world. God has called us to more than this!



**Be content with every situation in life**

*10 In my life in union with the Lord it is a great joy to me that after so long a time you once more had the chance of showing that you care for me. I don't mean that you had stopped caring for me — you just had no chance to show it. 11 And I am not saying this because I feel neglected, for I have learnt to be satisfied with what I have. 12 I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have more than enough. I have learnt this secret, so that anywhere, at any time, I am content, whether I am full or hungry, whether I have too much or too little. 13 I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me.*

This next point is a logical follow on. If we are looking to be at peace with God and we are making our attitude and actions right in that direction then we'll see Him in the situations of life. You see, Paul was imprisoned. He couldn't do what he pleased. He did not have the contact with them or others which he liked. It's not nice being banged up – particularly as he didn't deserve to be there. He could have been miserable, he could have been fearful. But he saw God in it – and he was content in it. He was content with what he had, where he was even though it was stressful – because in seeing God in the situation enabled him to rely on God.

We live in a world of not contents. We want certain things and strive towards them. Maybe we're blessed and content at the moment. Good – I hope you are. Maybe life is tough and you're struggling a bit in your faith. In either of this situation let me ask you a question – where's God in your situation. Is He right at the centre and you know His peace and presence – or can't you see Him. If you can't see where He is or discern His will, then ask where your attitude is tonight. Is it one that is like Jesus? Are you humble, obedient, seeking to see the best things in everything you see and do, committing everything to God, seeking good relationships with those God has given you. If that isn't the case then maybe you're not experiencing peace because you're not in a peaceful position.

Use that privilege of prayer to get into the right position with God this evening. If necessary ask someone to pray with you. God wants to give you that peace which transcends all human understanding and will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.



**Have a value added faith**

*16 More than once when I needed help in Thessalonica, you sent it to me. 17 It is not that I just want to receive gifts; rather, I want to see profit added to your account. 18 Here, then, is my receipt for everything you have given me — and it has been more than enough! I have all I need now that Epaphroditus has brought me all your gifts. They are like a sweet-smelling offering to God, a sacrifice which is acceptable and pleasing to him. 19 And with all his abundant wealth through Christ Jesus, my God will supply all your needs. 20 To our God and Father be the glory for ever and ever! Amen.*

Value added. You've heard the term before – Value Added Tax. Let me tell you what value added is. Each time a business transaction is done, the value of whatever you're trading increased, because everyone likes to take their cut of the profits. So for example if you buy a pint of milk from your corner shop the price you pay is the basic price of the milk, plus the creamery's cut, the wholesaler's cut and the retailer's cut because all sell it on for a greater price than they paid for it. And the government also takes its cut – which is VAT.

Paul was happy to receive help from them, not because he was on the scrounge but because he knew that to do so placed them at risk. It would identify them with him – a man of growing notoriety and bring them hassle from Jews and maybe Roman authorities. It was also a risk for people like Epaphroditus who risked his life to be messenger boy. He recognised that the act of showing him

love was helped them grow in the faith as they trusted God more and proved His faithfulness.

Paul was asking these people to take risks with their faith. They had shown a good attitude to him and grew through the risk they took. Now he was calling them to take risks with one another on showing humility. He was asking them to take risks with God because in doing so, they would grow and profit from it. Just as they supplied his needs, God would supply their needs.

How do we grow and profit on our faith? How do we add value to it? We do so by abandoning ourselves and our pride, we obey God and serve one another. That's the message of Philippians. To do that is risky – but God honours that risk and just as Jesus has received glory through it, God honours us through it. Whether its this life or the next, God honours those who honour Him.

Let me conclude Philippians by reading the verses again that sum this book up and are so critical to developing healthy Christian lives and a healthy church:

*5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

*6 Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
7 but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.*

*8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!*

*9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. (NIV)*

*Preached by Mark Reid  
MRBC Felixstowe 3/5/09  
© Mark Reid 2009  
Scripture quotes TEV unless otherwise stated*