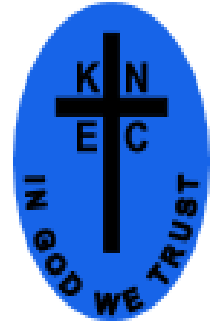




Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



Reading Philippians 4 : 1-9

Sermon: 13 December 2009

Sermon

The text for the sermon:

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Paul was in prison whilst writing this letter to the congregation in Philippi.. Paul had a very special place for this congregation in his heart. It was the only congregation that helped him financially with contributions which he greatly acknowledged and appreciated. The church at Philippi was the first-fruits of European Christianity. Their attachment to the apostle was very fervent, and so also was his affection for them. They alone of all the churches helped him by their contributions, which he gratefully acknowledges and appreciated. It was also the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. It stood near the head of the Sea, about 8 miles north-west of Kavalla. It is now a ruined village.

In the time of the Emperor Augustus this city became a Roman colony, with a military settlement of Roman soldiers. It was a “miniature Rome,” under the municipal law of Rome, and governed by military officers, who were appointed directly from Rome. It is no wonder that Paul uses so many “military phrases and terms because his readers would understand it. The congregation was formed by Paul and Silas when they preached there and it was the first church on the continent. Although the Macedonian converts were, as a class, very poor according to 2 Cor. 8:2, their poverty did not keep them from supporting Paul’s ministry.

But despite being in prison under very harsh circumstances, he reiterates several times that they must be joyful in the Lord. The word that is translated with joy “χαίρω” does not mean shallow happiness or describes the absence of emotional distress.

Although he had more than enough reason to sulk and to moan, he did not. Instead of feeling sorry for himself, he was thinking of others. Instead of focussing on his own problems and troubles, he was thinking of the needs of this congregation in Philippi.

How could he manage to be so joyful?

To Paul this was a state of mind fuelled by his faith, hope and love in the Lord and experienced as a deep peace within himself. Paul could look at his circumstances with the knowledge that He can trust the Lord. He also had peace with God and therefore with others as well. He managed to see the Sovereign Lord above all his trying circumstances. He trusted God’s control over him. He worked very hard to keep his faith in the Lord alive. We can hear this even in our reading this morning.

In the first line he says to the congregation to stand firm. The language and style suggest something of a military order namely to “stand firm” against the enemy like the Roman armies who was known for the same reason. They have to stand firm when it comes to the unity of the body of Christ which is the church. They have to think of God and his commands instead of focussing on the differences that existed.

In the next verses Paul addresses the differences that existed between two members of the Church in Philippi. We do not have any personal details of the women and the exact nature of their differences. We do know from Paul's words that the issue they had with one another was serious enough for him to address, meaning that it was most probably something that threatened the unity of the whole congregation. Paul wants to make sure the matter is dealt with and gives clear instructions on how the matter needs to be resolved. He first addresses the women by making a plea to each one to think of their unity in faith in the Lord. Then he says to his fellow worker in Philippi which could have been the pastor of the congregation and the leaders to help these women to settle their differences. It seems evident that Paul had faith in the women themselves and the church's ability to correct the problem.

These women were to have the same attitudes and values that Christ had (2:5–11). Paul also presented reasons for helping the women. First, they were Christian sisters. The last statement reveals Paul's confidence that their names were in the book of life. Paul seldom stated such confidence about people. Second, they fought with Paul for the gospel. Employing an athletic term again, he spoke of their value in the spread of the gospel. They not only helped Paul in his work but also fought alongside Clement and other unnamed fellow workers.

Then Paul comes to the core of his message namely that they would have the peace of God's presence among them. To have this peace will mean that they live near to God and talk to God through prayer and thanksgiving. It will mean that they cast away all their anxieties. The word that is used here is the same word that Jesus uses in Matthew 6. It means that they do not worry about their physical needs, clothing, food and drink and the future. If they have this peace they will have joy and then they will have the hope to look beyond their circumstances.

Paul urges them to live their lives as citizens of the new kingdom of God. They must behave in such a way that God is glorified through their actions of faith. Paul identified seven qualities which should characterize Christians. “True,” in the ethical sense as used here, means “truthfulness, dependability.”

“Noble” translates a rare word which has the idea of “worthy of respect, honor, noble.” The church leaders are urged to be respectable.

“Right” is a translation of the Greek *dikaioσynē*, which implies giving to God and people a justness that is worthy of them.

“Pure” translates a word meaning “pure” or “holy” in relation to God.

“Lovely” is found only here in the New Testament and has a fundamental meaning of “that which calls forth love” (*proσphilē*). It covers a host of qualities but basically means that the person should be attractive, lovable. “Admirable” occurs only here in the New Testament, and it means whatever is “praiseworthy, attractive,” therefore likely not to offend.

“Excellent” (*aretē*) means *morally excellent*.

Finally, “praiseworthy” means *worthy of praising God*. These characteristics would unite the church and present a good testimony to the world.

Paul urges them to live by his example!

And what an example is Paul to all of us. I think really his example helps us also to direct our lives to God. He knew suffering and hardship but managed to see through all this the hand of God. It made him joyful and peaceful.

We are all looking for joy and happiness. Even the world around us wants to lure us into a fake sort of happiness. It seems as if the secular world urges us all to find our happiness this Christmas in lights, music, shopping and money. And is it not so ironic that the even the power of money could not stand firm. Even the kingdom of money toppled over. Some of us even think that alcohol or drugs would make us happy this Christmas.

No if we want to experience the joy of Christmas we must have peace with God. To have peace with God will mean that we lead our lives by prayer and thanksgiving to God. It means that we will cast away all our worries and put our trust in the Lord Jesus. It will mean a life in obedience to God where He alone is in charge.

If we want the peace that transcends all our suffering, worries and troubles we need to find it in the arms of God this Christmas.

May we go from here and live by our example the real meaning of peace and joy this Christmas!

Amen