

# Park Road Baptist Church 5<sup>th</sup> September 2021

## Order of Service and Sermon

Greet each other

Song Come, now is the time to worship (Brian Doerksen)

Song 10,000 reasons (Matt Redman)

### Apostles Creed pp

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

### Prayer (including the Lord's prayer)

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our sins  
As we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
And the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

**Song** Behold the Lamb (Stuart Townend)

**Communion**

**Bring offering to the front**

**Song** Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King (Chris Tomlin)

**Bible reading** Philippians 3:1 – 11 (Margaret Jackson)

**Sermon**

The very first word of this chapter makes me smile and I think it might make you smile as well because the very first word in chapter 3 verse 1 is ***‘finally’***.

That is not what you expect half-way through the letter. In the Message it says, ***‘and that’s about it, friends.’***

You’ve probably heard the story of the little boy whose sitting with his dad in church and the singing has come to an end and the preacher gets up after preaching for 25 minutes and he says, ***‘finally’***, and then he’s still preaching 10 minutes later. And so the little boy turns to his dad and he asks, ***‘dad, what does the word finally actually mean’***. And the dad says, ***‘nothing at all son, nothing at all.’***

So, when Paul says, ***‘finally’*** or ***‘that’s about it, friends’*** don’t think for a minute we are almost finished – we are actually just over halfway in the letter.

Let me read verses 1, ***‘Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.’***

Paul is at it again with his theme of joy or rejoicing. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that Paul is in prison when he writes these words.

Of course, we cannot always rejoice in our circumstances, but we can always rejoice in the Lord.

And maybe this morning that is all you need to hear. Life might be quite a struggle for you – sometimes you just find yourself going through a really difficult time and of course you don’t rejoice in your circumstances, but you can always rejoice in the Lord.

It reminds me of the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk is one of those tiny little books tucked away in the Old Testament and it’s about celebrating all the good things we have in life from God like olives and vines and sheep and goats and fields etc. And then on the last page of his little book this is what he has to say,

***Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will be joyful in God my Saviour***

What a fabulous passage of the bible that is. Habakkuk is telling his people and he's telling us that even in the face of the most difficult and trying circumstances we can still be joyful on the inside.

That's the point that Paul has been making all the way through Philippians – he's in chains, he's in prison and yet he is filled with this incredible joy on the inside.

(2) When we come to chapter 3 of Philippians there seems to be a change in tone or mood. Have you noticed that? It's not that Paul has got all grumpy like you or I might get all grumpy but in chapter 1 Paul says he always thanks God for the Philippian believers and he's filled with joy when he prays for them – he says, I have you in my heart and I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus And we are given a real sense of Paul's warmth and love but in chapter 3 the mood seems to be changing – and it's not because he has suddenly got all grumpy. He told us last time to do everything without complaining or arguing, so he is not going to suddenly change what he believes.

I think the key to understanding what is going on here is to remember that Paul started life as a rather proud, self-righteous Pharisee but somewhere along the line a radical change took place – it was like switching on a light – he was completely transformed, and he became so much more gracious and kind and loving after he met Jesus.

But here's the point, with this new life came a new conflict. This was a conflict that Paul had never experienced before – it was a conflict with those he grew up with (the teachers of the law and the pharisees) because he was pulling away from that old lifestyle.

Whenever Paul got up to preach, these people also turned up and they would oppose him and try to undermine him and silence him.

And so, the reason for the change in tone in Chapter 3 is because Paul is not thinking about the people in the church at Philippi whom he loves with all his heart but he's thinking of the critics who are trying to worm their way into the church and destroy the fellowship of God's people.

(3) And so, this passage is like an explosive warning with some very strong language from Paul – ***'watch out for these dogs, these evil doers and mutilators of the flesh.'***

Paul is fighting against a group of people in the early church who taught that faith in Jesus is not enough – they wanted to add a number of other things like circumcision and other rules and regulations about what you could eat and not eat before you could be accepted by God.

And if you think all these rules and regulations are necessary for God to accept you then Paul says you are putting your confidence in the flesh. In other words, salvation depends as much on us as it does on Jesus – and Paul is having none of it.

I have to say I really admire Paul – when the truth of the gospel comes under attack, Paul defends it vehemently.

(4) So, he says, ***'watch out for these dogs.'*** I don't know if you have a dog at home who might come up and sit by your side and lick your hand. That's not the picture here - the dogs Paul has in mind are scavengers that run through the streets, and you couldn't control them and if you got in their way, they could tear you apart.

That's the word picture Paul is painting here when he says they are to watch out for these dogs – why? Because they will lead you astray and they will steal your joy.

These people are not driven by grace and love and compassion but by the law and rules and regulations and they want you to be driven by these things as well.

Their basic theology was that salvation was based on something that we do rather than by faith on what God has done.

And so, Paul begins this section with an explosive warning.

(5) And there were very few people better placed to give this warning than Paul. In verses 5 – 6 Paul gives us his impressive CV where he talks about his roots, his race, his religion and his reputation.

Here's what he says, ***'If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.'***

Surely that would impress God! Surely that would make us acceptable to God! Surely that would lead to a joy filled life?

Well, as Paul looks back over his own life, he makes this daring and startling confession – namely, he had put his confidence in the wrong place.

Paul considers all of his law keeping and religious commitment to be completely worthless compared to the righteousness he has freely received through faith in Jesus Christ.

It's quite remarkable that Paul was prepared to turn his back on all he believed to be true.

Paul would have been circumcised and taught the law before he was out of nappies.

We know that he studied the law under Gamaliel, who was a pharisee and was the grandson of the famous rabbi, Hillel – perhaps receiving private tuition. When he was persecuting the church, he was able to acquire letters from the high priest and the Jerusalem council to authorise the arrest and imprisonment of Christians.

In other words, he was a rising star within Judaism. Paul is someone who is going somewhere – he's quite a big shot and heading for the very top.

So, why does he turn his back on it all and throw it all away? The only explanation can be that the life of Jesus is now pulsating through his veins and with this new life in Jesus comes unspeakable joy.

And so, if anyone knew about the danger or religion and the emptiness of religion then it was Paul.

Before encountering the risen Christ on the Damascus Road, Paul's problem wasn't that he didn't have religion. He had religion alright. He was immersed in religion. His problem was that he had religion without reality.

(6) Having religion without reality will rob you of Christian joy.

One of the most dangerous and most subtle hindrances to Christian joy is to have religion without reality.

What happens when we are out of fellowship with God (and we've all been there), is that we start living off the faith of other people instead of nurturing our faith for ourselves. It's so easy to rely on the pastor to feed us on a Sunday and not actually be feeding ourselves during the week.

Or maybe we have stopped praying - not that we don't believe in prayer - we still believe in it, we just don't practice it.

Or it could be that we have stopped sharing our faith – it's more comfortable and cosier to surround ourselves with other Christians and so we keep quiet.

There will always be an absence of joy if our faith is not active and alive and real.

(7) Another hindrance to Christian joy is religion without morality.

I'm sure we are all familiar with the story of David committing adultery with Bathsheba.

After his night of passion, David was acutely aware of his guilt, but he was also aware that something had gone from his life – and so in Psalm 51 he prays, ***'Restore to me the joy of your salvation.'***

Sin breaks our fellowship with God and it's important that we keep short accounts with God.

So, when you sin, confess it right away.

Whether it's slamming a door in anger.

Or a wrong motive.

Or seeing something that needs to be done but leaving it for someone else.

Or just being selfish.

Or watching something you shouldn't watch.

Whatever it happens to be, it's important that we get in the habit of confessing it right away so that we can receive God's forgiveness and experience the joy of our salvation.

(8) God wants all of us to experience his abundant joy in our lives.

This joy is not based on circumstances – remember Habakkuk or even Paul for that matter.

We rejoice in the Lord, not necessarily in our circumstances.

But be careful because we can also be robbed of our joy.

Let's make sure our walk with God is real and active and we are nurturing our faith each day – especially through prayer and scripture reading.

And also, it's important that we keep short accounts with God, who is always ready to forgive us.

**Song** Rejoice the Lord is King (Charles Wesley)

Blessing.