Bringing Jesus to the Table (Philippians 4:2-9) Memory Verse: Philippians 4:6-7

September 21st, 2025 Scripture Reading: Psalm 100

**[SLIDE 1]**

 We are entering into our seventh week of this series on Philippians. We have subtitled it: A Context for Joy. All throughout this letter, even though he writes in chains, Paul has expressed his joy. And he finds joy in all kinds of things. He sees himself as a slave of Christ, that brings him joy. Being able to share the gospel, that brings him joy. The fact that Christ is going to be returning, that brings him joy. He finds joy in his friendship with fellow believers and the unity that we can share in Christ. In fact, four weeks ago, the week’s sermon was called, “How to Become United (and Stay That Way)”. **[SLIDE 2]**Unity is an occasion for joy. But when we talked about unity, we also mentioned how it is so very often misused. Unity is a feel good word, so we sometimes apply it to situations even when there might be trouble brewing.

We, of course, see the fallout of disunity within the political realm of our country right now. A young man being shot for speaking his beliefs and hosting conversations; attempted assassinations of our president. We are in dire need of some unity. But I want to narrow the focus a bit. I would like to think of this in familial terms and we can extrapolate out from there. My wife and I, for example, don’t always see everything eye to eye. **[SLIDE 3]** And there are times when one or both of us are not on our best behavior in the midst of these disagreements. It’s easy to get stubborn and to insist on your way of seeing things. And as two individual people that God has brought together as one in holy matrimony, we have often felt the tension of living in unity even while we disagree. But having a different perspective is not the problem. The problem **[SLIDE 4]** is how we treat other people in the midst of our disagreement. Do we raise our voice? Maybe, at times. Do we sulk? A little. Do we dig in? So deep sometimes. Do we get defensive? No, I would never do that!

 Well, needless to say, our spousal disagreements are hard to keep to ourselves in a house filled with kids. When mom and dad are cold towards each other at the dinner table, it makes for an awkward meal. No one quite knows what to say, everyone is sort of on eggshells not wanting to disturb the tension. But above all, everyone in the family is going to **[SLIDE 5]** pretend that nothing is wrong. Mom and dad are fine, the food is fine, the vibe in the room is fine. Keep your head down, eat your vegetables and just know that despite what you see and feel, we are unified! There is an unspoken fear that, if it were spoken, would say something like, “Don’t talk about disunity. It will only lead to more disunity.” Sometimes talking things through can make things worse, but talking things through also accomplishes something very important: it keeps things **[SLIDE 6]** honest. *Talking things through keeps things honest*.

 So while Paul talked about unity back at the end of chapter one, he revisits the topic here. **[SLIDE 7]** And Paul is not about to sit idly by and keep his head down eating his vegetables. Paul comes right out and addresses the issue head on. Now, since we are basically reading other people’s mail here, we do not know what the issue is, but we do know the names Paul dropped. (READ 4:2-3) So there is some problem that exists between Euodia and Syntyche. Somehow their disagreement was causing strife within the church, so much so that the issue was reported to Paul. Remember, this letter from Paul was read out in front of the gathered church. So now the feud between Euodia and Syntyche has been aired out in front of everyone. Any tension that existed has been broken by calling it out. I think, in Paul’s mind, **[SLIDE 8]** *true unity is worth the argument.* Meaning, Paul is not interested in people faking it. Paul is not interested in people wearing masks or ignoring the elephant that might be in the room. Call it out! ((As Paul says in verse 2, **[SLIDE 9]** ‘Come to an agreement in the Lord.’ This is a beautiful sentence. This is an exquisite piece of advice. Agree in the Lord. Paul has made a brilliant move here. **[SLIDE 10]** He has taken an argument between two people, two entrenched people, two bristly people, two difficult people and he has added a third person: **[SLIDE 11]** the Lord. Paul does not say, “Just move past this, get over it.” He doesn’t even use the word “compromise”. He brings the Lord Jesus into the conversation. With Jesus sitting at the head of the table, surely Euodia and Syntyche will both be changing their tunes. They are both going to be more careful with how they phrase things, they are both going to be more willing to listen. With Jesus presiding over the conversation, this disagreement takes on a whole new atmosphere.)) Unity can be recovered not because one side finally destroys the other with clever arguments, or because one side gathers enough outside support to squelch the other. **[SLIDE 12]** *Unity can be recovered because both parties are coming before Jesus,* both bowing before him, both submitting their wills, and both coming to an agreement in the Lord. This is the way to do it! This is how to get from butting heads back to **[SLIDE 13]** unity. This works in a church setting, as well as in a marriage. But what does that mean for our country? Without Christ presiding over both parties, we will not find unity, political or otherwise. Bring Jesus into the fray, bow before him, and come to an agreement in the Lord.

 The other thing that Paul achieves here is that he removes the “elephant in the room” effect. The dispute cannot continue under the surface. It has been made known to the gathered church. Euodia and Syntyche are accountable to the rest of the body at this point. But not only that, the rest of the church members can help support, assist, encourage these two women to come together in the Lord.

 Even though disagreements are a reality and there are times when we will feel tension, Paul is adamant: Rejoice! **[SLIDE 14]** (READ 4:4-7) Rejoice and be gentle with one another. Why? Paul’s reason is not what you would assume. We might affirm it is good to rejoice and express gentleness because it is a nice thing to do, it’s a preferred way to live, it maintains a good attitude. But, according to Paul, we are to rejoice and treat people with gentleness because the Lord is near. Now this could be a reference to the omnipresence of God. Paul did just get done saying that, when it comes to your arguments, remember that Jesus sits at the table with you. He is near. This is true enough, but certainly Paul has in mind the coming reality that has motivated him and has been his focus since he began ministry: the second coming of Christ **[SLIDE 15]**. This verse marks the fourth time Paul has put this event in writing. The return of Christ is so important that it ought to literally affect how we treat other people! This is no afterthought, it is a paradigm shift, a whole new worldview. Jesus is coming back, he is near! So live accordingly!

 Now admittedly, Paul wrote these words somewhere in the ballpark of 60 AD. Jesus died and rose again thirty some years ago, less than a generation. The possible return of Christ was a much more fresh idea than it is now. At this point, it’s been over 2,000 years…Has there been a change in plans? A divine cancellation? Has Jesus forgotten about his promises to return? How can this idea of Christ’s return still motivate us today? It seems like an idea that has gone stale. So some well-meaning teachers and pastors have tried to remedy the delay by sort of spiritualizing the event. Instead of a physical second coming, we can experience a **[SLIDE 16]** spiritual second coming. Jesus is real to us, he is present even now and that is all we need. That sounds pretty good…but it is simply not what the bible tells us. Jesus told us he was coming back. Paul was sure that he was coming back. Every one of the gospel writers tells us that Jesus is coming back. Did we miss it? No, we can’t miss it, because when he comes all else will cease. When he comes it will be the last day, the end. We are still going…time is still marching, and Jesus is still to return. Paul is not really in a position to give us advice on what to do if Jesus doesn’t return. It did not occur to him that 2,000 years would go by. He can’t speak to the second coming being a stale idea. But, what does he suggest? Well, look at verse 6. **[SLIDE 17]** Don’t be anxious about anything. But in everything, in prayer, let your request be made known to God. And what follows from such practice? Peace. Peace that doesn’t even make sense. I’ll tell you, if you want to be blessed, come to our prayer meeting on this coming Wednesday night. You will be able to trade anxiety for peace…that is a good trade. Don’t miss the opportunity.

 How can you believe Jesus is coming back? It’s been so long? Well, it might not make sense, but through prayer, I don’t have to worry about it. Through prayer, I am at peace. Through prayer, I can abide on his timetable. Through prayer, I make my requests and one of those requests echoes the very end of our bibles. **[SLIDE 18]** Revelation 22:20, “Come, Lord Jesus.” My longing for Christ, my impatience, my anxiousness, my doubts that Christ’s return is even still on the docket, all these feelings can all be gathered together and morphed into a powerful prayer. “Come Lord Jesus! I know your promises, and I hold you to them. I trust that what you have said is true. Lord, may your kingdom come! Lord, take me home! But Lord, use me in the meantime. Lord, give me your peace.”

 **[SLIDE 19]** Prayer is a gift. It is for us. It gives us life. It draws us close to our Creator, and Savior, our Lord and King. We cannot get by without it. It is good for any and every situation. *Prayer brings peace.* Again, the current news cycle bears this out. When our fellow Christian, Charlie Kirk, was gunned down, how did Christians respond? Did we riot? Did we burn down buildings? Did we attack the other side? No. But a lot of prayers were said. In the face of injustice and violence and rampant evil…prayer brings peace.

**[SLIDE 20]** Dave Nessia is an outdoorsman/adventurer who signed up to be a contestant on the television show *Alone.* In season 3, Dave and nine other participants were essentially exiled into the wilderness of Patagonia. All they have is some camping equipment and some cameras to record it all. The last one to tap out wins a gigantic cash prize. Dave was determined to be the last man standing, and he did an amazing job building a shelter and catching fish. He even crafted a chess set in his spare time. But Dave had one flaw in his plan. He felt that if he could stockpile his resources, he would be able to outlast any competition. So, at one point, he had smoked and dried 32 fish which he planned to use to make soups going forward. Meanwhile, his body deteriorated more and more. Starvation was setting in for Dave which meant that his mental faculties were becoming compromised as well. Food hoarding while simultaneously starving does not make for a good plan. Through his arduous experience, Dave lost perspective. In his quest for resources, he couldn’t see what he already had. He spent his days out trying to hunt down a 400 hundred pound boar, but failed to make use of what he had available. In the end, after a routine medical check revealed that Dave’s blood pressure had reached a dangerous 80/20 and his internal organs might soon begin to shut down, it was determined that Dave had to be hospitalized. When told the news, Dave quickly defended himself saying, “But, I’ve got so much food. I can continue to eat. I can eat higher percentages of the food I’ve got.” But it was too little to late. As Dave gathered his supplies to leave he says with longing, “I wish I woulda ate more. I’ve got so much food… I feel frustrated.”

 In many ways, we suffer from a similar malady. How many of us feel spiritually frustrated? **[SLIDE 21]** How many of us are in starvation mode in our walk with the Lord. We want a giant boar, that thing that will fix all our problems, that situation that will finally provide what we are missing. We ignore what has been provided for us. And so, we feel frustrated.

 My friends, **[SLIDE 22]** prayer is what sustains us. Prayer is the fish we have stored away, available to us at any time. Prayer is the one thing we will never run out of, and yet we so easily ignore it. We are on the lookout for something bigger, flashier, something the seems more substantial. In the meantime, we starve ourselves. And I remember when we watched this episode of Alone, my wife and I were both shouting at the screen, “Just eat some fish! Why go through this? Eat a little more fish!” I think in many ways, God observes our lives and our situation similarly. He is shouting, “Just come to me in prayer! Feast on the life you can find there! Stop being so distracted! Slow down, and live on what I have provided for you.”

 Don’t be anxious, don’t worry; pray. Make your requests known with gratitude. And the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds. It is interesting that Paul would use a military term like “guard” when he is talking about peace. Yet that is how peace is achieved and maintained. We fight for it, and when we have peace, it must be maintained, guarded and cared for lest we should have our peace taken by our enemy.

 It’s important that we subsist on prayer alone, personally and privately. But we must not neglect the corporate aspect of prayer either, the strength we find when we feast together. One of our problems as a church is that our life is defined by scarcity. This is simply the nature of how things work. Budgets are tight because money is scarce. Ministries are thin because volunteers are scarce. Events are cancelled because people who are willing to attend are scarce, even Sunday mornings feel like attendance is scarce.

 But of all the things we have in such limited supply, prayer is not one of them. Prayer is never scarce. God’s presence is never in limited supply. Prayer is a well that never runs dry, but we must choose to drink from it. Prayer is loaf of freshly baked bread, but we must choose to partake of it. Prayer is a powerful weapon, but we must choose to wield it.

 The choice is ours. As a church, I want to see us drink from that well, eat from that bread and take up the weapon that God has furnished for us. That’s what our prayer nights are all about. Coming together as a church, as a family and seeking the Lord together. Stop starving! Stop running on fumes! There is no scarcity here! We have all that we need. Let us enjoy it together, come together and pray.

 One more time, here is the process as Paul lays it out: **[SLIDE 23]** Don’t worry, in everything, make you requests in gratitude, and the peace of God will guard your heart and mind.

 A couple verses left here. **[SLIDE 24]** (READ 8-9) Paul borrows from the classic Greek virtues of the time: honor, justice, excellence. He tells the church to put these virtues into practice. But notice the progression here. Where does practice begin? In the mind, in our thoughts. We think about these things, these great truths of God that even pagan Greek culture can recognize and these honorable and excellent thoughts lead then to actions that match.

 Of course, all of these issues: our disagreements, our prayer life and our pursuit of virtues are all fulfilled in the person and presence of our Lord **[SLIDE 25]** Jesus. In our clashes with one another, we invite Jesus to preside at the table, we allow him to lead the conversation. When we feel the pangs of hunger and feel the scarcity of life, we invite Jesus to fulfill our every need. When our actions are lacking, we focus our thoughts on Jesus, the source of all that is true, noble, right and pure. He is the source of all that is lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. Keep your focus on Christ and the peace of God will be with you. Amen.