

[gentle men]

:: philippians 4.5 ::

One verse this morning. Philippians 4 verse 5. It reads this way:

Philippians 4.5 - Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

In this section of chapter 4 we're being given a bunch of commands from God by Paul. These are commands that are essential to the Christian life. And throughout the Scriptures we see again and again two important principles when it comes to commandments.

First - God's commands are given to us for our benefit. He gives them to us because He wants good things for us, not because He's a cruel taskmaster or manipulator. In fact, we know that the Lord is a gracious and generous Master, who has brought us *into* His household as friends and heirs out of the kindness of His own heart.

Second - we know that God's commands are His enablings. He holds us responsible for our actions, therefore, because He is just, He will never command us to do something we are unable to do. We **CAN** do all of the things we're mandated to do and not do in the Bible. So, when the Bible commands us to forgive, for example, we can do so and we *must* do so if we desire to live in the fullness that Jesus offers to His people.

Today we've come to a text that is very plain but very personal. It is a straight-forward command that is applied to *every* Christian. We cannot just cruise past this and think, "yeah, we agree," but don't do anything about it or don't bring application into our lives. David cruised past the command to not multiply wives and it absolutely destroyed his family. Adam and Eve cruised past the command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and they plummeted all of creation and humanity into sin.

When God sets a regulation or a mandate before us, we *must* take them to heart and **apply** them to our lives. Because, when we don't, we're directing ourselves toward the path of Lot, the path of Jonah, the path of all those who missed out on what God really wanted for their lives on earth and for their reward in eternity.

So, we take this text seriously and we discover that it has 2 parts: A command and a motivation.

The command is the entree. It's the main course of this verse.

Paul says:

Philippians 4.5a - Let your gentleness be known to all men.

Obviously the key word there is *gentleness*. That is where our attention is drawn. What's interesting about this particular word is that it is used only 5 times in the New Testament, always in epistles, yet the full meaning of this word is very rich and extensive.

Among other things, it can mean gentleness, patience, moderation, reasonableness, unselfishness, forbearance, good will.

In the King James the word that appears there is the word *moderation*. Speaking on this text, one Bible commentator puts it this way, he says:

Moderation...means meekness under provocation, readiness to forgive injuries, equity in the management of business, candour in judging of the characters and actions of others, sweetness of disposition and the entire government of the passions.
 { Clarke's Commentary on Philippians }

It seems like something that is hard to really get our minds around, until remember how Jesus Christ is described in the New Testament.

2 Corinthians 10.1a - Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

Matthew 11:29 -[Jesus said] take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Jesus Christ lived as an example for us to follow. He gave us a pattern to emulate in how we honor God, how we interact with others, how we speak and behave and live the human life.

But, not only that, we also see that God has sent this gentleness He's commanding down to us.

James 3.17 - But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

So, we see that this gentleness that we're *commanded* to is also *supplied* to us by heaven. Once again we see that this life we're called to is about choices. We have the supply, we have the examples, we have the mandate, we have a mission. Now it's up to us to decide whether we will walk in the Spirit, or whether we will not. Whether we will live as Christians, or whether we will not.

And here, Paul says, let your gentleness be known to all men.

It strikes me that something cannot be *known* unless it is *shown*.

I can *tell* you that I am the worlds greatest chess player, I can *tell* you that I can run a 4 minute mile, I can *tell* you that I am able to command the wind and the waves at my discretion, but what matters is if I can prove those things. If two people are in some sort of dilemma and one says 'I know how to fix this' the other will invariably say, 'Show me!'

We are not called to be theoretical Christians, where life is lived in a vacuum and *IF* certain situations arise, then we have philosophical answers as to what the best solution would be.

No, we're called to a hands-on, field-working, disciple-making faith that happens in the real world. Jesus comes along and gives us a mission and the equipment to carry it out with heavenly peace and joy filling up our hearts and He calls us to live our lives out in front of the world, so that others might be drawn to the light and find salvation.

And Paul says, God is gentle, so He calling you to gentleness. Let that gentleness be known to **ALL** men. And we saw how gentleness is this big word which has many difference facets which we see demonstrated in Christ. So, whether those around us are friend or foe, we are called to be Jesus to them. Whether it's a supporter or an adversary, a co-laborer or an opponent, we are called to **love** others and share the truth with them. We're called to a Christ-like gentleness, which means we're called to meekness and patience, unselfishness and longsuffering. We're called to see people as Jesus sees them and we're called to moderation in life. Not being swayed to extremes of doctrine or extremes in indulgence. Not called to extreme severity when dealing with those we might disagree with. Moderation. And it makes perfect sense because we know that a man who walks with God is a man at peace not just with the Almighty, but with the people around Him. If we are at peace with God we're going to be at peace with others. Able to hear from God and be used by God. To be moved around this mission field to do the work that God wants us to do.

But this incredible plan and equipping that the Lord has for His people is not theoretical. It's real. And it requires us to submit under His Master plan. It requires us to actually take His word to heart and mold our lives to it. It means that God is asking me to go out of this place today and show loving patience to all men. He's asking me to remove selfishness from my heart and replace it with moderation and self-control, so that I can gently and reasonably reach out to those who are without hope today. That's what God is asking of us.

It's not easy, but it is possible. And we have some motivation to move forward in this commandment. It's the second half of verse 5:

Philippians 4.5b - The Lord is at hand.

The Lord is at hand, or the Lord is near. It's a wonderful and important reminder.

There are 2 sides to this coin.

The first is the fact that Christ's return for His Church is imminent. We work hard to remind ourselves of that every single week here at Calvary. Today may be our last day on earth, either individually in death or corporately in the rapture. Either way, our time before the Bema is near. Very near. And I want to have finished my race. I don't want to be on a water break while a sub covers my spot when the Lord comes back. I want to do what He's called me to do. And that's what we all want. We get distracted, we get bogged down, so we need to keep the nearness of the Lord's coming in our thoughts each day so that we are motivated by that moment when we are before Him, presenting ourselves as part of His Bride, and He reveals to us all that He's done for us while heaven waited for our arrival.

But the second side of the coin is that the Lord is near us right now. Bible commentator Dr. Robert Gromacki points out that the word for *at hand* can refer to time **or** place. The time of the Lord's coming is at hand, but the Lord Himself is near us at this very moment. The Holy Spirit is within us. Not just a power or a force, but a Person, who is with us as we walk. God is near you now. He sees your life. He sees your relationships. He sees your struggles. And He's offering you peace and purpose in this life. He's offering you a life that comes packaged with joy and satisfaction.

But that life requires that we lay aside our human heart and our human understanding that we might take on the heart and the life of Christ. It requires that we follow the Lord's directives and His direction. And this morning, we're directed to put on the gentleness and the meekness and the moderation that we see in Christ. That is the directive. That is the path that leads to fullness of peace and joy in the Lord.

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen is a classic Christmas carol. But in that simple title we see the plan of God for our lives as disciples. That we receive His rest and His joy as we put on Christ and truly become gentlemen in the heavenly sense. Men who are full and useful and at peace.

So, today, let your gentleness, your submission to God, your Christianity be known to all men. Not hidden away, not theoretical, but lived out on purpose, because the Lord is at hand. He is with you, enabling you, directing you and moments away from removing you from earth and installing you for an eternity in heaven, glorified and complete.