

Joy and Peace

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Date: 15 June 1997

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the AM service on June the 15th, 1997. The preacher is Dr. Paul Barker.

The sermon is entitled Joy and Peace and is from Philippians chapter 4 verses 1 to 9. Even death on a cross.

To endure injustice or abuse as Jesus did to his death takes real strength. Gentleness, you see, is a characteristic marked by strength rather than weakness.

And the incentive for the Philippians is that the Lord is near. That could mean either or both of two things. The Lord is coming soon, so we must be ready for his coming.

Or it could be that the Lord is near because he's present amongst you as Christian people.

Therefore we must behave properly and exercise gentleness. Just like school children, when the teacher goes out of the room, usually misbehave.

[1 : 11] You probably did it as I did. You throw paper planes or you screw up bits of paper and hurl them across the room to somebody on the other side. Or you slam people's desks and you misbehave. And as soon as somebody says, the teacher's coming, you all race back to your desks and pretend you've been working.

Well, the incentive for the Philippians to exercise gentleness of character is that the Lord is near. He's coming down the school corridor, so get right before he gets here. Gentle Christians stand firm.

But those who can't cope with abuse or injustice against themselves are usually those who fall away in the end. Gentle Christians stand firm. The fourth demand of Christians in order to stand firm comes at the beginning of verse 6.

Do not worry about anything. Now, I imagine that if I asked those of you who are worriers to put up your hands, the majority would.

I imagine that if I asked you to put up your hand, if in the last 48 hours you've worried about at least one thing, almost all of you would. For most of us have worried about the weather, the food, whether we'll be on time, what we're going to wear, our jobs, our health, our wealth, our parents, our spouse, ourselves, our children.

[2 : 33] We're probably worried, if we're broad-minded, about the problems in Bosnia or Northern Ireland or anywhere else. I remember there is a Monty Python song about people who are worrying.

They're worried about the baggage retrieval system at Heathrow. It's a bit of a mockery of those who worry because there are so many things that we can worry about. We can worry about the state of our roads or their education system or our government or the travels that the Premier's doing or not doing.

We can worry about the casino. We can worry about our football team. We can worry about somebody else's football team. We can worry about Tony Lockett's injuries and everybody else's injuries as well. And indeed, we can worry about not worrying and we can worry about worrying.

When I was in Jordan some years ago, I went in a taxi and like virtually every man in Jordan, this taxi driver had worry beads. And while he was driving, he would be flicking his beads.

And I worried. If he didn't do that, I probably wouldn't have worried. But because he had a hand off his steering wheel worrying while he's driving up this mountain, I began to worry.

[3 : 39] All of us worry and probably all of us worry quite often. And we probably worry about everything that we can worry about if the truth be known. And the Philippians were like us because when Paul says don't be anxious about anything, literally what he says is stop worrying.

He's not saying don't worry. That is, you're not worrying at the moment, but don't. He's saying you're worrying. Stop it. And the same could be said to us as well. Stop it.

But the trouble is when we read this, we probably think it's easier said than done. It's all very well to say stop worrying, but I can't. There are too many things in my life to worry about.

There are too many people in my life to worry about and situations. But you see, Paul gives the only possible resolution to worry. He says, don't worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Don't worry. Pray. Pray. I don't think I've ever met a chronic worrier who has his or her prayer life in order.

[5 : 00] Someone said that the way to be anxious about nothing is to pray about everything. You see, when we pray to God, we stop worrying.

Well, you might think, no, that doesn't work because I pray and I still worry. My response would be, then maybe you don't pray as you ought because prayer to God is an expression of trust in God, in God's sovereignty, that he's in control of all things, his faithfulness, that he will do what he promises to do, and his love for us in that he will give us and provide for us good things and all that we need. when we pray as we ought, as Christian people, we are expressing our confidence in a God who is sovereign, who is faithful, and who is loving.

And if we do that, we can't be anxious because anxiety is a rejection of trust in God. To be anxious about something is to say that God's not in control, not faithful, and not loving.

To be anxious is saying that I'm in control, or I'm not in control, but nobody's in control, certainly God's not in control, and I'm worried about how this is going to happen in the future, and I'm denying or rejecting or ignoring God's promises that everything that I need, ever, will be provided by him.

[6 : 21] If we pray as we ought, we won't worry. If we're Christians who worry, we're either not praying, or we're not praying as we ought to pray.

So my statement to you, as well as to me, is pause. Stop worrying. Pray. But it's not prayer to a remote God, it's a prayer to a God whom we know, whom we know to be sovereign, faithful, and loving.

So pray. Cast your cares on him, knowing that he cares for you. It's only from God that we'll find grace to help in our times of need.

As the psalmist says, it's only those who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, who have no fear or anxiety about their world or circumstances. So pray.

Pray to God. Pray to a God who is sovereign, who is faithful, and who is loving. And if you do that, your anxiety will go.

[7 : 28] And if you doubt that God is sovereign, faithful, and loving, then read the Bible to find out that he is, and then pray, and your anxiety will go. And the promise that God gives us to any of us who pray to him about our anxieties or worries is in verse 7.

If we do what he says, what St Paul says about praying and not being anxious, the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Words we know well because they're often used at the end of a service. But words there that are taken out of context. For the words that hear are a promise to those who pray about their anxieties and worries.

And if you pray to God about them, if you cast your cares on him, then his peace will guard your hearts and minds. The idea is a military term.

Philippi, where this letter is written to, was in northern Greece. It was a Roman colony and it had a Roman garrison to guard it from enemies. That's the image that Paul's using here.

[8 : 35] The peace of God is the garrison around us protecting our hearts and minds from anxiety. You think your heart and mind is beset by the anxieties, cares, and worries of this world?

Pray, and God will protect it from it by setting up his peace around it as a garrison in order that you do not have anxiety about anything. This peace of God is beyond our wildest imagination.

That's what it means by surpassing all knowledge. It's not just some inner, carefree, casual attitude to life, nor is it some psychological solution to a person who's a bit anxious and bites their fingernails.

But rather, it's somebody who receives that assurance from God, has a confidence in a God who is sovereign, faithful, and loving.

Christians who are warriors do not stand firm. Christians who pray to a sovereign, faithful, and loving God stand firm.

[9 : 39] or the fifth and last thing that is demanded of Christian people is that their minds must be full of holy things.

If their minds and hearts are being guarded by God's peace, then their minds will be full of good, godly, and holy things. So St. Paul says, finally, beloved, in verse 8, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is anything of excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think on these things.

Think on these things. Fill your minds with these things. Ruminates on them. Ponder them. Meditate upon them. Fill your mind with these things.

Don't just empty your mind of evil things and leave your mind empty, but fill your mind with these things and anything bad will be cast out of your mind.

See, minds are important. Minds, in fact, are critical. Sadly, in our day and age, the mind is despised. In Christian circles as well as in our world. Our society is one that generally doesn't respect or admire or look up to or aspire to having good minds.

[11 : 08] Descartes said, I think, therefore I am. But it's probably better for Christians to say, I think, and thus I am. That is, how we think determines who we are, what we do, and what sort of person we are.

Our thinking leads to our behaviour. Our actions and in the end our destinies as well. So if we think about evil things, we're likely to become an evil person.

If we think about violent things, we're likely to become a violent person. If we think about pornographic things, we're likely to become an immoral person sexually. If we think about gossip and slander, we'll be a person who shows no respect for others.

If we think about ourselves, we'll become more selfish than we even are now already. It's very clear. And the Bible time and time again from beginning to end makes it clear that our minds must be right if we're to be people of God, Christian people.

And the debates that go on in our society about whether watching children watching violent films makes them violent or not is in the end a non-debate. It's clear that it does. The reason people try to create some doubt about whether it is is because they've got a vested financial interest in violent pornographic films or games or whatever.

[12 : 23] But it's clear that as we're saturated by violence, we become violent. Saturated by sex, we become sexually immoral. Saturated by gossip and slander, we become a person who shows no respect for anybody else, et cetera, et cetera.

The remedy to it, Paul says, is think about these things, the things that are true and honourable and just and pure and commendable and pleasing or inspiring love.

They're the things of God. Indeed, they're all things that describe God. So Paul is saying not so much just think directly about God but think about the things of God.

Think about the things that God would think about. Think about the things that would give God pleasure. Think about the things that God has made that are good rather than the things that are distorted by evil.

If we're anxious people, think about these things and as our mind becomes full of these things of God and as we pray to God, our anxieties will go and as Paul says at the end of verse 9, and the peace of God will be with you.

[13 : 34] If we're to persevere, that is to stand firm as Christian people and last and live a lifetime as Christian people, then we need to be people who agree in the Lord, that is express Christian unity.

We need to be people who rejoice in the Lord despite adverse circumstance. We need to be people whose gentleness is evident to all.

We need to be people who pray rather than worry. And we need to be people who think on godly things, who fill their minds with the things of God for to them and to them alone will the peace of God be with them.

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