

Philippians 4:2-23 (PM)

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, music has a way of capturing our cultural mood. In 1989, if you're old enough, take you back to those glory days, the summer of 1989.
- The Song of the Year, wow, I want to know who did that. That was fantastic. Oh, yeah, there it is. Okay, the Song of the Year at the Grammy Awards in 1989 was, anybody, don't worry, be happy.
- A reggae classic. My guess is most of us know that song, even if many of us weren't alive when it was released.
- It resonates because it's so simple and because none of us want to worry. But all of us do, all the time. We live in an anxious age.
- There's a statistic out of America. In 2018, one quarter of all visits to the doctor ended with a prescription for anti-anxiety medication. 25% of doctors' visits.
- [1 : 0 5] And that was before COVID. Imagine what it is today. Many of us, perhaps most of us, struggle with anxiety or some other mental health disorder.
- We worry, right? Despite listening to the song, we wish we were happy. We wish we could simply choose to be happy. But happiness is so elusive.
- And anxiety today is so pervasive. Another song that still resonates nearly 60 years after its release is, I Can't Get No Satisfaction by the Rolling Stones.
- Man, I should just mention Golden Oldies more. This is the most response I've ever got from this congregation. I have more. Next time I'll just, okay. I can't get no satisfaction.
- And I try. And I try. And I try. And I try. Our world worries. We worry about everything.
- [2 : 1 0] We aren't happy. We can't get no satisfaction. We like to think we're progressive. We like to think we're progressing. That tomorrow's world will be better than today.
- It is. But when considering our increasing anxiety and our chronic discontent, it does not feel like the secular vision is leading to a better life for people.
- We're living in a mental health crisis. And into this context, Jesus offers us something so much better. Tonight, we hear how all of us can know a peace that passes all understanding, that will guard our hearts and minds.
- How we can say that in all things, we have learned to be content. Our context is a world of anxiety and dissatisfaction. And into this place, the gospel offers us peace and contentment.
- The gospel declares that you can experience a peace, God's peace, that passes all understanding. And you don't need to wait till you die. You can know it today.
- [3 : 2 3] You can be content. Whatever your circumstances, today. Our text shows us how. So that's where we're going tonight. The first half of our text is about not being anxious like the world around us, but instead knowing the peace of God that passes all understanding.
- And then the second half of our text is about knowing a contentment, a satisfaction that transcends our circumstances. This is good news for a world that's living in deep darkness.

Peace and satisfaction are available in an age of anxiety and discontent. And the secret to knowing both, both peace and contentment, is given in verse 5 of Philippians 4.

Paul says, the Lord is at hand. That means the Lord is near. Yahweh is here.

Paul is writing, God himself is in our midst. This is the central reality of life if you were a Christian.

[4 : 31] God is here. And if God is here, if God is near, if the Lord is at hand, then peace is possible.

And we can be content in him. Remember the guy who's writing these words, Paul? He's rotting in a prison cell. He had this unbelievable encounter where the risen Jesus revealed himself to him.

It said, Paul, here's your job in life. Go tell the gospel to the ends of the earth. And Paul is stuck in prison. Suffering. Isolated.

If anyone could be anxious. If anyone could be frustrated. Surely it would be the imprisoned apostle. And yet he's not. He's experiencing a peace that passes all understanding.

He's not singing, I can't get no satisfaction. He's not restless or frustrated. He's content. Because he knows that God is near. And that truth transforms his reality.

[5 : 35] In Philippians 4, Paul uses the language of living life in the Lord. The Lord is at hand. He's near. He's so near that by faith we can live in him.

If you are a Christian, you can live life in Christ. Just look at how much he uses this in chapter 4. Look at verse 1. He says, stand firm in the Lord.

Verse 2, agree in the Lord. Verse 3, help these women who've labored with me side by side in the gospel. Verse 4, rejoice in the Lord. Verse 7, the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Verse 10, I rejoiced in the Lord. Verse 13, he talks about being through Christ. He can do all things. Verse 19, my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

And verse 21, greet every saint in Christ Jesus. Do you get it? The secret to being content in any circumstance. The secret to knowing the peace of God that passes all understanding is found by living your life in Christ.

[6 : 47] This is worth losing everything else to gain. To be found in Christ is worth more to Paul than everything else combined. Because being in Christ enables us to experience a peace and a contentment that nothing can ever take away.

So I want to look at both of those things tonight. First, being in Christ brings God's peace. Look at verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I will say rejoice. Let your gentle forbearance be seen by everyone. The Lord's at hand. Don't be anxious about anything.

But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Living life in Christ enables the peace of God to guard your heart and your mind. So the question is, how do I live in Christ?

[7 : 53] What does that look like? Paul gives a list of commands that help us understand how we can live in Christ. He tells us to rejoice in the Lord in verse 4.

He tells us in verse 5 to let our reasonable, or better, this gentle, firm resilience be known to everyone around us. He tells us not to be anxious about anything, but instead in everything to pray.

And it's this one, this verse, verse 6, that reveals that living in Christ, experiencing the peace of God, being guarded against anxiety, comes to us through prayer.

Prayer. Prayer is being with God. Prayer is talking to God. It's drawing near to God.

And it's listening to God. It's communing with the Lord. And it's what living in Christ is comprised of. Paul uses four different words for prayer in verse 6 to highlight various ways to pray, to enjoy fellowship with Christ and life in Him.

[9 : 02] Prayer for most of us is hard. It's not our first instinct. We often turn to prayer as a last resort, when we're at our wits end and nothing else has worked.

Often we turn to prayer when we're desperate. We're not dependent on our prayer and everything, but only in things that are out of our hands. But Paul here invites us to talk with God, to enjoy being with God in every aspect of our lives.

To pray to Him our requests and our thanksgivings. To be with God at our highs and our lows. In our moments of anxiety and ambivalence and ecstasy.

Enjoy intimacy with the Almighty. Work into your life a robust, continuous, all-encompassing life of prayer. And notice Paul does not say that if you have requests and you pray about it, you'll receive the peace of God once God answers those prayers.

No, the peace of God comes in the moment of prayer. Before the prayer is answered. If it's answered. The resolution of your request is not the moment that God's peace is given to you.

[10 : 15] God's peace is granted in the act of prayer. Before anything's happened. Before your prayer has even been answered. It's the act of prayer. It's turning to the Lord with your supplications and thanksgivings and requests.

That's what gives us God's peace. It's not answered prayers. But offered prayers. Now, the peace of God here does not necessarily mean emotional tranquility.

Rather, it means that the very peace that God himself enjoys all the time will be gifted to you as you pray. And as you live in Christ.

Prayer itself brings God's peace. God's peace guards your heart and your mind. Because in prayer, we learn how to live in Christ. And with Christ.

In prayer, we see and experience that the Lord is at hand. Through prayer and in prayer, we experience the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. So every church has a plan for how we want to form people in Christ.

[11 : 22] Every church has an idea of how we can make people grow in Christ. How to disciple people or develop believers in their faith. Our church's heritage is Anglican.

And Anglicans traditionally believe that maturity in Christ, spiritual formation, discipleship, however you want to call it, all of this comes through one main way. Through prayer.

Our church's entire discipleship strategy for 500 years has been common prayer. Shared prayers.

As Anglicans, our response is, let's get people praying. Let's get everyone praying scripture together. This is how we'll grow in Christ. Prayer is hard for most of us.

And so churches, our church uses pre-written prayers that help guide us in what we pray. Our pre-written prayers are almost exclusively Bible verses. I think 86% of the prayer book is Bible verses.

[12 : 24] Meaning that God's word becomes our words brought back to God. We hear God's word spoken to us, like we've just done. And then we pray God's word back to God.

God's word. Eugene Peterson calls this reverse thunder. It's what they did in the Psalms. So since remembering to pray or knowing what to pray is hard, our tradition has developed these prayer guides that anyone can use.

We have this cool morning prayer guide. It's called morning prayer. We have an evening prayer guide. We're doing it right now. It's called evening prayer. We have prayers for different seasons of life.

We have prayers for different seasons of the year. And we do all of this because we are a people who are formed through prayer. It's one of the main things it means to be an Anglican. I love it.

We are formed in Christ as we pray. After this sermon, we're going to pray. Because in prayer, we experience the peace of God, which passes all understanding.

[13 : 25] And it keeps our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Regardless of whether our prayers are answered the way we want them to be, we still receive God's peace through them.

And we experience God's peace because prayer reminds us that we are now at peace with God through Christ. See, because of our sin, we have made ourselves God's enemies.

We are not at peace. We are wicked and he is holy. But because of Jesus, because he took away and atoned for our sin on the cross, we can now enjoy a peace with God.

And prayer, talking to God, being with God, reminds us of this reality. We are at peace with God through Christ. And so we enjoy the peace of God whenever we pray in Christ.

But because we're in Christ, we're at peace with God. And this reality transforms our worry and our anxiety into thankfulness and praise as we pray.

[14 : 30] Enjoying peace with God and the peace of God propels us to pursue peace in our other relationships as well. That's what verse 2 and 3 are about. Where Paul appeals to two specific women in the Christian community to get along.

Paul is appealing for peace between them. For an end of their conflict with one another. He asks them to agree. And for the Christian community to come around them to bring peace.

Because we are in Christ, so we should be at peace with one another. We should work out our differences. And if you know others in our fellowship who aren't agreeing with each other, we should take it upon ourselves to be a peacemaker.

To bring peace where there is discord. Paul then appeals for peace with our world. That's what verse 5 is about. He says, let your reasonableness be known to everyone. Reasonableness is not the best.

It's a very loaded term. And that kind of gives the wrong sense. It's more, let your quiet confidence or your gentle resolve, your gentle yet unshakable life in Christ, be known to everyone as you live.

[15 : 41] May the peace of God that is guarding your hearts and your minds in Christ be a character trait that the world notices in you. The peace of God in us should be attractive to an anxious world.

Paul is saying, be like Christ. Be even-keeled. Be reasonable. Be resilient. Be unmoved. And let the world see your inner peace, even as you suffer at their hands.

He then says, be at peace with yourself. This is what verse 6 is about. Don't be anxious. Learn to be content by prayer and receiving the peace of God, the peace with God, and being in Christ.

It's all about peace. Now, this passage is not saying that if you suffer from an anxiety disorder, you shouldn't pursue medical care. It's not saying that you should pray rather than take your prescriptions or pursue counseling.

Paul is writing about Christians who are worrying. And he's saying, instead of worrying, we should pray. And in the verses that follow, Paul writes the importance of right thinking to empower action and to experience the peace of God within you.

[16 : 54] So he instructs us to hold our thoughts captive. Seek mental health support if you feel your thoughts are pervasively negative or anxious. Keep careful attention to your mind, to your thoughts.

Focus your mental energy, he writes in verse 8, on whatever is true, on whatever is honorable or just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable. If there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, then think about these things.

What he's saying is that what we feed our brains, what we read or watch or listen to, it matters. It affects how we think and what we think.

So think about things that are good. You know, if social media leads you to think negatively, as it does for many, then don't use it.

For many of us, especially young people, social media is an addiction. It's a poison. It's a drug that corrupts your mind. And it makes you anxious. So if it makes you think negatively, don't look at it.

[18 : 02] That's what Paul is saying. Because what we feed our minds matters. Another example is pornography, which works like a poison and can kill healthy relationships and contaminate our minds with filth.

We experience the anxiety and the dissatisfaction of our world today in large part because of the toxic diets we are feeding our minds. So instead, think about godly things.

And as you think on them and learn them and receive them and see them in other godly people, do them and the peace of God will be with you. Paul writes. Watch what you're feeding your mind.

Get friends or a trusted mentor to gather around you and help you improve your mental diet and hold you accountable. If you catch yourself worrying or being anxious, pray.

And consider the diet you've been feeding your mind. And if you can, try to shift your thinking toward godly things. And if you think your anxious thoughts might be stemming from a mental health condition or a disorder, then seek the appropriate medical care to help your thinking patterns.

[19 : 15] Seek a community such as this one who will support you and walk with you and pray with you that you may experience the peace of God. The gospel offers us peace.

The peace of God that passes all understanding and comprehension. It offers us salvation from perennial anxiety and worry. Freedom from the concerns that plague the world because we know that the Lord is at hand.

And so the gospel brings us peace. Peace with God through the blood of Christ. Our sins have been paid for and forgiven by him so we can know peace with him forever.

The second thing Philippians 4 says the gospel offers us much more briefly is contentment in any circumstance. We can know satisfaction in our life.

Look at verse 11. I have learned, Paul writes, that in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low and how to abound. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty in hunger, abundance in need.

[20 : 25] I can do all things through him who strengthens me. This kind of contentment is unheard of in our world today.

We are conditioned to be perennially unsatisfied with our lives. I've never been satisfied. I will never be satisfied. We are discontent because we are looking for satisfaction in all the wrong places.

See, we are told that satisfaction comes through achieving worldly goals or purchasing worldly goods. but we can see around us this just isn't true. Satisfaction does not come through owning a home in Vancouver or through having an intimate relationship or experience or through children or a dream job or an electric car.

C.S. Lewis writes, the reason even the best possible worldly goods will not satisfy is because we were created for a degree of delight and fulfillment that they cannot produce.

We're created for God. To know God. To love God. To live our lives with God and in God and through God. So nothing short of God will bring us satisfaction.

[21 : 41] He's what we're made for. To worship God and enjoy Him forever. Nothing else will make us eternally content. We can't get no satisfaction apart from Him.

That's the secret. The only way to satisfaction, to contentment is Christ. Because He is why you exist. To know and love and worship and enjoy Him.

To live your life in Him. Everything else is garbage compared to being found in Christ. And if this is true, then it means that true, complete, total satisfaction and contentment should come to us when we are in Christ.

People should look at us and see our reasonableness, our quiet, confident resolve, our gentle demeanor and resilient faith and our lives should point them to Him.

We should indeed be the most content people on earth if we are in Christ. Christ. So if you are not content in a certain area of your life tonight, ask yourself, have I invited Christ to be with me in that area, in that space?

[22 : 58] if you are not content in your singleness or in your marriage, if you are not content at work or with your wealth or lack thereof, if you are living in Christ, with Christ, ask yourself, in this area, have I invited Him to live with me?

What would it look like to hand over that area of your life to Him? To invite Him to be Lord even in that space? The reality is our God is the God of peace.

He is near and He offers peace to all who are in Christ. And from that place of abiding in Christ comes contentment in all things.

Whether you have much or little, whether your life is one of abundance or scarcity, whether you're in a prison cell or in a Vancouver mansion, you can say, through Christ strengthening you, you are content.

There's a successful lawyer in Chicago in the 19th century who was named Horatio Spafford. He was rich, married, five young children, he's a lawyer, I think, and he chose to invest all of his wealth in Chicago real estate.

[24 : 11] Surely was a good investment 200 years ago. Well, in 1871, tragedy struck Spafford. His only son, who was four years old, died suddenly.

And in that same year was the Great Chicago Fire, which swept across the city, destroyed all of his real estate properties, and completely ruined him financially.

Two years later, Spafford's wife and four daughters were sailing to England when their ship was struck by another and sank. Spafford's wife was found unconscious, floating in the water, and was rescued.

But all four of his daughters drowned. His wife from London sent a telegram with only two words, Saved, Alone. Spafford journeyed to London to be with his grieving wife.

And as he crossed the spot where his daughters had died, he was inspired in his prayer to write these words. When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.

[25 : 31] Horatio Spafford and his wife endured unimaginable suffering and loss. And yet, through prayer, in the form of a poem, Spafford was able to express the peace of God that passes all understanding, guarding his heart and his mind in Christ Jesus.

Being in Christ, experiencing the God of peace with him, Spafford was able to endure suffering and declare, it is well with my soul. Our world tells itself that we're progressive.

We are progressing. That the future is bright. But our world has no answer to the anxiety we suffer and the dissatisfaction we feel.

Christ offers all of us a peace that passes all understanding and a contentment in any circumstance. And it is ours if we will abide in him. We're going to respond to God's word tonight by standing together and singing Spafford's prayer.

It is well with my soul. And I encourage you in this space, hearing this prayer and singing it, to think of that area of life where you are experiencing dissatisfaction or anxiety.

[26 : 43] And in that space, invite Christ to meet you. Invite Christ to be Lord over that part of your life. And may you begin tonight to live life in him.

To know his peace and be satisfied in him. Amen.