

Peace

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[0 : 01] in our thoughts and underlines the sort of theme of this morning in terms of where we are in the book of Philippians. But this reading is found in Matthew 6 and I'll just read to you now. This is what God would have you hear and then when we come to Philippians it'll be added to. So Matthew 6 verse 25 reads, now hear God's word, therefore I tell you to not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet your heavenly father feeds them.

Are you not more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they neither tall nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you? O you of little faith, therefore do not be anxious, saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear. For the Gentiles seek after these things and your heavenly father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Well let us come to God in prayer. And so if you would like to turn to chapter 4 and we're looking at verses 2 through 9. And the passage focuses heavily on peace in the context of disruption, the disagreement, the disagreement and anxiety. And who doesn't want more peace?

So I'm going to pick it up in verse 2. So now hear God's word. Philippians chapter 4, beginning at verse 2. I entreat you.

Rejoice. Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not 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 surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. Amen.

[4 : 07] Well, if you have been hopefully following through this series, you would recognize by now that Paul has a wonderful habit of building on what he has previously said. Therefore, in order to understand what he is saying here, you almost have to have understood what he has just said. Like a master builder, he doesn't build on any material. He doesn't build anywhere.

He builds on a place where he has already laid a sure foundation. And one of the key foundations that has been laid in the book of Philippians is the kenosis, the self-emptying of Christ, that Christ, who is God, becoming man, and in emptying himself of self, as it were, or at least that is the application for the Christian, then we are then able to no longer concentrate on self-interests, but pursue the interests of God. And so within this letter, it seems to be the case that the one thing that gets in the way of pursuing Christ more fully is ourselves. That our greatest opposition is not necessarily external to the church or external to ourselves, but it is ourselves. And that that is the greatest opposition that any one of us face. And the deluded ones are the ones who think that they are further ahead than what they really are, that they are more mature than what they really are. And of course, maturity has a way, Paul says, that the more mature you become, the more immature you see that you are in particular areas of your life. And he says, if for those of you who don't see it that way, you know, then God will reveal it to you, sort of that gentle sense of humor. Well, if you don't see it my way, then God will point it out to you, that this is the way that you ought

to be seeing it. Now, of course, Paul's way is God's way as an apostle declaring the word of God. But I don't want you to miss how important it is to appreciate that what Paul is saying here is building upon what he has already said. It's not a Bible study, but it's absolutely important that you understand how believers mature, how you as a believer grow. And so for those of you who read the Bible like a telephone book, where the number above what you're reading and the number below what you're reading has no relation to the number that you need, those who read the Bible in that way end up taking snippets out of here, there and everywhere and are not left with a cohesive and clear teaching from the Lord. It's sort of bits and bobs and you're not quite sure how it fits together. And therefore, it's absolutely crucial that when you read a letter, that you start at the beginning and you finish at the end. And the letter is structured in such a way where you begin to appreciate what has been previously said, builds and equips you as a fellow Christian to read and understand what the writer is saying. And now it's come to the point in the letter which we always knew we would get to, to the issue within the church, the area of disagreement between two women in particular. And this is striking if for no other reason than their names are placed within a letter to the whole church. And then he quickly moves on from them, commending them for their work and their service, though highlighting their disagreement, and then calling the church to rejoice in the Lord and ultimately what we are to practice as Christians. And that is a phrase that has gone out of fashion very quickly, to be a practicing Christian. I mean, when was the last time anyone ever referred to you, are you a practicing Christian? Right, do you remember? Do you remember back in the day when they would say that phrase, are you a practicing Christian? Or I'm a practicing Christian? And it's because we recognize that the Christian life is not just something which happens to us, it is something which we participate in. It is true that we have been changed and we are being changed. There is something happening to us. But at the same time, we participate in that change by practicing the things that God has given us. So Paul is teaching here on those things which will build the fellowship of God in the proper way. How we are to live and therefore how we are not to live. He has answered many things already and now he has to deal with a few issues within the church. He's already addressed the possibility of people being immature and this disagreement might just be one example of that immaturity.

And the answer is really very simple. Go from disagreeing to agreeing in the Lord. Now here's the summary of what we have before us. In particular, Paul is drawing attention to these two women. And the reason we mention this is because news of their disagreement has obviously got as far as Paul. And Paul is now writing back to the church and he has mentioned their names in a letter to the whole church. Is this going to be embarrassing for them? No, not at all. Because if news of their disagreement has reached Paul, then the whole church knows already that these are two women that cannot seem to get on. And so by Paul addressing it openly, he is simply affirming the biblical principle that if your disruption, if your sin is in public, then so should your confession be. And so it must be as it is addressed. Remember how Peter in Galatians moves from one table to the other table, the table of the circumcision party, when he saw them arrive. And such an offense that was, he caused such an offense that he was actually denying aspects of the gospel, that is how serious it was that he changed his table fellowship, that Paul addressed him openly. And the question is, well, isn't it correct rather to take him aside and have a quiet word with him? No, not at all. Not at all. If the sin is in public, then it must be addressed publicly. Because the repentance must also be in public. Therefore, if I can give you an example of a slightly different way, if you sin around the dining room table, then you cannot go up into your bedroom, or you cannot go into another room and repent before God privately. Because the offense is not just before God, but it is before the people in which you were sat. And therefore, you are bound by God to repent before everyone. You are to come clean before God in their presence. Now that is way more difficult than saying, well, I've done it privately. I've done it privately. How do we know things are properly addressed if they're not addressed in the proper way? And so it's very simple that these things are laid out very clear and very simple. These two women are causing disagreement in the church, or they are known for their disagreement, and it is not something that should be happening. So it is now addressed out in the open in a letter to the whole church. And by their disagreeing, they're simply imitating each other. And we know that Paul's already said that if you're going to be an imitator, you'll be an imitator of those who follow Christ. You'll be an imitator of him. And so two women disagreeing are simply imitating each other.

[12 : 31] They're imitating each other's disagreement rather than agreeing in the Lord. But even though there is this fault which can quickly be addressed by them laying aside their personal preferences and entering into a state of emptying yourself of self and self-denial, then you're able to agree in the Lord. You cannot do that if you're not denying yourself because yourself is getting in the way. You cannot agree in the Lord if yourself is getting in the way of agreeing in the Lord. And then Paul commends them for their work in the gospel, but ultimately reminds them that their names are written in the book of life. This should change everything. In other words, because of who you are, this is not what you should be. Because of who you are, this is not what you should be. And then in verse four, he goes on to say, rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be made known to everyone. So rejoice in the Lord and then be reasonable and let that be known to everyone within the church. And he finishes that with the Lord as at hand. In other words, this is another gentle reminder that we're all one day going to stand before the Lord who is coming. And we will stand before him and we want to stand before him with a clean conscience. We want to hear those words, well done, my good and faithful servant.

These are what we aim for. Now he follows this with the need for the church not to be anxious about anything. And it might just be possible that the anxiety is the reason for the cause of disruption in the church. That these two women just might be anxious over something, perhaps even anxious over the future direction of the church, not the early Christians thought like that. That's a very modern way of thinking. But their anxiety over the church or whatever it may have been could have been the cause of disruption. And so Paul is now re-emphasizing, be anxious about nothing, but in everything take it to God in prayer. Anxiety always causes disruption. It may not have done in this case, but if he's put it in the same context, the anxiety of these ladies might just be the reason for their disagreement. Now when you take everything to God in prayer, God promises, verse 7, that the peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds. The Christian is not to be the person who is forever trying to guard the peace that they have. That's not what it says. What it says is the peace of God is that which guards you. But how often do you live your Christian life trying to guard the peace?

But it says here the very opposite. It is the peace of God which will guard your heart and mind, those who belong to God. And such peace is able to take care of everything that we do not understand.

And anxieties have much to do with what we do not understand. So the peace of God is now able to take care of everything we do not understand. It surpasses all understanding and is able to guard your heart and your mind. This is what the peace of God does. It takes care of those things that you do not understand and it guards you. It guards your heart and your mind, the place perhaps where your anxieties are felt the most in feelings and in thoughts. And this peace is able to take care of a number of different things. Not only will it take care of your lack of understanding, the God of peace at the end of verse 9 is the originator of that peace. He is the creator of that peace. It is, comes from him to you. And so you have no reason to be anxious, though we can understand why it creeps in, because of who you belong to. And the God of peace gives you peace that surpasses understanding, guarding your hearts and your minds. And then of course in verse 8 we have the exhortation.

What we are to practice is a Christian. We are to be a practicing, conscious Christian. We are to be consciously Christian in everything we do. So whatever we are to do, we are to fix our whole life on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable. These are the qualities that God would have us practice all the time. And the very fact that we are to practice these qualities is simply an indication that none of us are qualified completely within these qualities.

[17 : 47] These are something which we practice all the time, lest we get out of practice from them. This is not something like you can take a mass exam and then you're qualified.

If you were to go back and take some of the exams you did in your earlier life, do you think you would pass today? And the reason for that is because you're out of practice. This idea of practicing is crucial to building on the strength that has previously been strengthened within your life. So you practice these things because if you don't, they diminish over time. You can't be qualified in them where you get a tick and now you can move on as though that period of my life is done with.

They have to be practiced because without the practice, they diminish. And so you practice these things which are lovely, true, just, honorable, commendable. These are the things that you are to participate in. That is the pattern of faithfulness.

And so when you agree in the Lord and you're practicing these things and you come to agreement in the Lord, there is now peace. So you don't just have personal peace that takes care of anxiety, but you have peace within the fellowship as you practice the things that Paul lays out here.

And the God of peace will be with you. And there is no other way around this. No shortcut. It is simply this is the way disagreements in the church are taken care of. This is the way your personal anxieties are taken care of. You participate in the things that God has given you to participate in.

[19 : 36] Imitating those who are faithful, practicing these qualities lest they diminish in your life, and agree in the Lord over all the things that we are meant to agree in.

So here's the main point, or two points, but here's really the main one. Guarded by the peace of God. I don't know if you've noticed, but hopefully you have. Out of all the things that we are told to do, Paul includes something that we are not meant to do.

And I've said this before, that one of the crucial ways of learning is not just through affirmations, but through prohibitions. That we as people have to be told what we are not to do, as much or perhaps is equal as those things that we are to do. But here, Paul only gives us one thing not to do. He surrounds it with plenty of things that we are to do. We are to practice what is true, honorable, just, commendable, lovely. We are to agree in the Lord. We are to take everything to God in prayer, but we are not to be anxious. Do all of these things, but do not do that.

And then he gives a solution for that when you are, that if you are anxious, then do this instead. If you're anxious about anything, take it to God in prayer, but do not be anxious about anything.

But if you are, then you are to take that anything, whatever it may be, to God in prayer. And the illustration that Jesus gives us is the best one. That the birds of the air have no economy.

[21 : 18] They do not go out to work. They do not earn a wage. Everything that they have is provided for by God the Father. There is no economy in the bird kingdom.

They fly, they gather, they have nothing other than what is provided for them. And then Jesus says, are you not more valuable than they?

And it seems to me that anxiety does one thing more than anything else to your heart and mind before God. And that is, it gets you to question how valuable you are.

In other words, to put it in a different way, what it's saying to you is, will you really be looked after? It's questioning, getting you to question your value to God.

Will I really be looked after? Will I really be taken care of? And Jesus commands you to go outside and look at the birds of the air. And he gets you to look at those things which have no economy, that doesn't work like we work down here, and God provides for them.

[22 : 26] And then he says, are you not more valuable than those? As if he knows, of course he knows, that the one thing that anxiety goes after the most is whether or not you will be all right in the future.

Whether or not you will be looked after in the future. Whether or not your life is valuable to someone else to then be taken care of.

And perhaps that's what anxiety goes after you the most. That the one thing that you question, though you may not put it in the same phrase that I am using, is, is God going to look after me ten years from now?

Five years from now? Or even tomorrow? So Jesus puts, in the context of anxiety, he puts value. You are more valuable than those other things that God looks after. Therefore, God is going to look after you. That is the conclusion that you are meant to arrive at.

[23 : 29] And what anxiety wants to do is it wants to fill up today with the troubles of tomorrow. Anxiety wants to fill up today with the worries of tomorrow.

All those thoughts and worries that you have about the future are filling up today. Now the trouble with that is, is all of those thoughts may never happen.

And if they never happen, they're therefore not true. And therefore what anxiety is doing is filling your mind with thoughts that are not true. Because if they're never going to happen, they're not true. And if they're not true, why should they fill your mind as a people who are to live by truth? And so we must understand that neither do we have any control over the future.

We have no future direction. We have no power to direct the future for our own life. It is something which will shape us in the grace of God.

[24 : 28] But neither should we bring those thoughts into today and try and sort them out beforehand. Because we may not know what will happen or what will not happen. Difficult?

Extremely difficult. Especially for those who like to plan ahead. And that's the wisdom of the world. But it is certainly not the wisdom of God. The wisdom of the world says, plan for a rainy day. And yet Jesus says, you don't even know what tomorrow will bring. You could be planning for something that will never happen. So the wisdom of the world tells you to think in ways where you can control the future.

Or try and control the future. But in the economy of God, in the grace economy, you are to trust God who does actually have full control over the future.

Therefore, do not be anxious. And do not let the feelings of anxiety drive you to panic. Rather, take everything to God in prayer. And the peace of God, which will surpass everything that you don't understand.

[25 : 39] Surpass all understanding. Everything you don't understand. Everything you don't understand. Is then able to guard your heart and your mind from there on. As you take it to God in prayer.

You're not to guard your peace. By making sure you have enough money in the bank account. You're not to guard these things. As though you're guarding your own peace and security for the next few years.

Rather, the peace of God is to guard you. As you take your anxieties to God in prayer. Now, when we complete praying to God in our anxieties.

And when God, in return, gives us this peace. Which surpasses all understanding. Guarding our hearts and minds. We are now able to tell the difference between the anxious person.

Who is remaining anxious. And the person who is really committed. To taking everything to God in prayer. The anxious person is forever trying to guard their peace and security.

[26 : 43] With plans and thoughts about the future. But those who take it to God in prayer. Have those anxieties taken care of. By the peace and grace of God.

Guarding and strengthening us. The anxious person lives their life. By trying to guard their seatbelt. In a car crash with their body.

Is like trying to guard steel toe cap boots. With your toes. Who would do that? Is like trying to guard the city wall.

With your body. Who would actually do that? And yet how many of us. Live in a way. Where we're trying to guard the peace that we have. We're putting ourselves.

In the wrong position. It is the peace of God. Which guards us. It is not the other way around. And yet too often. This is one of the key parts of the Christian life.

[27 : 43] We get wrong. Because we have followed the wisdom and the spirit of this age. Which says things like plan for a rainy day. You don't get that from the word of God.

You don't get it from the word of God. Because it wouldn't make any sense. Because in the word of God. You are told. That you do not know. What will happen tomorrow.

You do not know what tomorrow. Will bring. You have no idea. And therefore. You are to take today. The anxieties that you have today. About tomorrow.

To God in prayer. And the peace of God. Will guard your heart and mind. To all of those thoughts and feelings. That you have. About. The future. So don't be the type of person.

Who tries to guard the seatbelt. In a car crash with your body. But that is exactly. It's no wonder you're anxious. It's no wonder your life is full of anxiety.

[28 : 40] You got it all the wrong way around. Take it to God in prayer. And allow the belt. To guard you. Allow the peace of God. To protect you. So with that in mind.

Paul moves on. To practice these things. And this is a very simple point. But an important one. Ultimately he's saying. That those things which are true of God.

Should also be true of you. Whatever is true. Honorable. Whatever is just. Pure. Lovely. And commendable. The excellency of these things. Are things that we are to practice.

In other words. Paul actually says. He even goes as far to say. Verse nine. That what you have learned. And received. And heard. And seen in me. Practice these things. In other words. He draws attention to himself.

As someone who follows God. In the right way. And he has enough confidence. To call these believers. To follow him. As he follows Christ.

[29 : 40] And that's the. That's the role of imitation. It's like I said to you last week. It is absolutely impossible. To build a church. Or build a family.

Without the role of imitation. You just cannot do it. God created us to be imitators. There is no way around it. As I said.

On the Bible study. On Wednesday evening. The very tenth commandment. Which is a prohibition. Against desire. And coveting. Is actually in the context.

Of imitation. God is not telling you. That you are not allowed to desire. He's telling you. You are not allowed to desire. What your neighbor has. And this is because.

That imitate. Since we are built. To be imitators. We are forever in danger. Of imitating those things. Which are not good for us. And therefore.

[30 : 35] Paul is drawing attention. Again and again. The role that imitation plays. Within a church. That is able to live at peace. With God.

And with each other. And have a personal peace. That deals with the anxieties. That they have of tomorrow. It does come down. To imitation as well.

So the Christian life. Is not something. Which is happening to you alone. But it is something. Which you are to participate in. You are to practice. And live in the pattern.

Of faithfulness. You are to empty yourself. Of self. You are to imitate those. Who follow Christ. So here's the exhortation.

As we close. Be assured. That God is with you. And be assured. That the God who is with you. Is the God of peace. Who gives peace. To guard your hearts.

[31 : 31] And your minds. And give you assurances. Jesus. Does not have a hard heart. The reason Jesus explains.

What he does in Matthew 6. About the birds of the air. And about your anxieties. Is because he knows. That when people. Deny themselves. And take up their cross.

And follow him. They are going to need. Some assurances. They are going to. They are going to. Need to know. That if I deny myself. And take up my cross.

And follow you. Am I going to be looked after. And the answer is of course. Yes. But as human beings. We are so slow to believe.

We are of. A little faith. As Jesus says. And we are constantly. Needing the assurances. We need to be told. Over. And over. And over. Again.

[32 : 26] Because we are not quite convinced. Of the truth. We know it. But it is not yet. Permeating our lives. To the point. Where it is affecting.

What we think. And believe. And how. We live. And yet nonetheless. Jesus gives us. These. Assurances. The wisdom of the world. Tells you to plan ahead.

And yet Jesus teaches you. Clearly. To not even worry about tomorrow. For tomorrow will take care of itself. It has enough trouble. All of its own. Which you can have no control.

Over you. Over. Therefore. Don't build up your anxieties. By trying to control things. That God can only control. Rather take all those anxieties.

To God. In prayer. In other words. Be a practicing. Christian. Be a practicing. Christian. Don't live your life.

[33 : 21] As if. God will take care of everything. For you. But rather practice. Those things. Which God has given us. To practice. Most importantly. Here. Be anxious.

About nothing. But in everything. Take everything. To God. In prayer. And the peace of God. Will guard. Your hearted minds.

And the God of peace. Will be with you. Amen. May the peace of God.

Be with all of you. Who are in Christ Jesus. Now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.

[34 : 40] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[37 : 10] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.