

Meditation #1 – Philippians 4:4-7, “Transcendent Joy and Peace”

Feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry continue to mark our world in this pandemic season we are living in. As we follow the news day after day concerning all the effects of the Covid-19 virus, our hearts can so easily become weighed down and discouraged.

The writer of this Epistle, the Apostle Paul, knows what it is like to go through difficult times. When he wrote this letter to the Philippians, he was in one of those difficult situations. Worse than being isolated or quarantined, Paul was in a literal lockdown in prison and in chains for the faith. From there he calls us to rejoice! What kind of man can rejoice from a prison cell? What kind of people can rejoice in quarantine, or from the hospital room?

We learn here that true peace is *not* based on circumstances - rejoicing doesn't come from being in the right season of life or having our health. But true peace and rejoicing is anchored in who God is at *all times* for his people. Therefore, the peace God offers to the believer transcends all circumstances and is able to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Today we want to think about this transcendent joy Paul speaks of. First, he says.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice! Rejoice??? If these words came from someone who *wasn't* Paul, I think we'd be tempted to dismiss them, saying, “you don't quite understand what I'm going through at the moment.” But that is not the case. Paul reminds of his circumstances in ch. **1:12-14** & how he was in in prison for the faith.

1. Paul's whole life story is marked by suffering (**2 Cor.11:25**). He was *beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, in danger* from various enemies, going without *sleep, food & drink*. In chapter **Phil.3:10** Paul speaks of knowing Christ and the fellowship of his suffering in, & of being conformed to Christ's death.
 - a. Trials, tribulations, plagues, famines, pestilence, the sword are not unique to our time. But they are the troubles that have fallen again &

again on people in this sad world. From his prison cell, Paul calls God's people to rejoice!

2. Paul practices what he preaches— in Phil. **1:12-14** we read of how Paul *rejoices* in what God is doing *through* his imprisonment. Because of his chains many others are now made *bold* to preach the gospel! In **2:17** he rejoices that he could be poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifices and faith of God's people.
3. This call to rejoice is not a call to simply “be happy” or to “cheer up” or to “smile more!” But it is a call to rejoice *in the Lord*. Rejoice in WHO God is in all circumstances.
4. Jesus reminds us in **Jn.16** of the trials and tribulations we'll face in this life, but he says, “*take heart, I have overcome the world!*” So, we can rejoice in who Jesus is for us right now, as our victorious Savior!
5. Rejoice *always!* In every season of life and in every circumstance. We can rejoice in seasons of prosperity and poverty, in seasons of health and sickness, because God is always faithful. What about during a pandemic, can we rejoice? Yes! Rejoice. What about from a hospital bed or when the doors of our business close? Yes! We can rejoice. *Why?* Because Christ is on the throne, and he is working through our hardships to produce something beautiful!
 - a. We don't rejoice *in* the circumstances themselves, but with Paul we can rejoice in what God is doing *through* difficult circumstances! From the prison cell Paul himself wrote most of the New Testament! We don't know why God is bringing this trial into this world or our lives. But we know he IS doing something and growing our faith in him. So, even today, in the midst of all that is going on, we can rejoice in the Lord. Because he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Second, Paul says, “be anxious for nothing” – here is another tough verse we might want to object to! This seems like an impossible task! We can't stop how our

hearts feel at times. There's no switch we can just turn off. **Paul** was anxious at times (**2 Cor. 11:28**). *He speaks of the daily pressures on him & of his anxiety for all the churches.*

6. Feelings of anxiety or despair are not the issue, but it's what we **do** with them. Paul doesn't just say, "don't be anxious," but he calls us to give those anxieties over to the Lord. To lay all our burdens down at the foot of the cross!

7. *In everything...At all times in in our lives, bring your requests to God.*
Aren't you grateful that you worship a God that you can unload on today?! God hears all our worries & sorrows and he invites us to pray. **Ps.56:3** *when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you*

8. Paul says by *prayer & supplication* with *thanksgiving* let your request be made known to God. Paul is essentially saying here, Take your time to go to him and unload burden after burden. God knows everything going on in our lives. We pray in obedience to God's word, and for his glory, but prayer is also for our benefit. We are told here this kind of prayer **leads to transcendent peace!**

9. This is God's *promise* –the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will **GUARD** your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. This isn't just peace in general, but it is **God's peace!** It's the peace that flows from God himself. The Living God is a God *not* of *anxiety, confusion, and heavy burdens*, but he is a God of peace. A God who calms the storm, a God who casts out the demons and puts people in their right minds, a God who causes the heart to be refreshed by Living Water.

a. Jesus says to us in our anxiety, **Matt.11**, "*Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"

b. Here Paul speaks of transcendent peace – even in the **prison cell** Paul could find Jesus! Even in a pandemic, we too can find Jesus! There is no place on this earth where we can't find Jesus in prayer – in our

homes, in the hospital bed, in the supermarket, he is there. And he *infuses* those places with peace. He gives peace that not only transcends circumstances, but also a peace that guards us.

- c. He guards us from anxieties & despair, listeners. Do you need peace to guard your heart & mind today? Are you feeling overwhelmed by the ongoing effects of the pandemic, by bad circumstances or the struggles of your own heart? Guarding peace is found when we cast all our anxieties on him, because he cares for us. Yes, we have a friend in Jesus and he is our burden bearing savior!
 - i. He bore our sins at the cross, and that greatest anxiety we face over our own daily sin that weighs us down, Jesus dealt with at Calvary. He gave his life for our sins, to deliver us from our greatest bondage that threatens to ensnare us. We may be comforted by knowing that our Lord will continue to care for our lives.
10. Whatever trials are before us, we are NOT alone. We are not living in our own strength to provide for ourselves or to uphold our daily lives. But the God of peace is with us. The God of Peace, who raised his Son from the dead, will equip us with everything good that we might do his will, working in us that, which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Thank you for listening and till next week, the Lord willing.