

Praise, Prayer, and the Peace of God- Phil. 4:4-7

Outline of Phil. 4:4-7

Proposition: “Whatever circumstances you find yourselves in, rejoice in the Lord, let your requests be made to God, and the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. In other words, Paul is communicating the importance of: (1) Praise; (2) Prayer; and (3) the Peace of God.

FCF: (1) We do not rejoice, we complain. (2) We do not pray, we worry. (3) We do not know what true peace is.

Introduction

Imagine, if you will, being held a prisoner for your faith. There is a possibility that you will be sentenced to die and day after day, you have to think on this possibility. You have started a Church, but now you are separated from that church and you want to communicate to them encouragement and truth that will help them stand as Christians in an unbelieving world.

What would you write to this church? Remember: these may be your last words. If you were imprisoned, it would be so very easy not to consider others better than yourself at this time. I mean, the church to whom you are writing is free - not imprisoned. It would be easy to ask them to pray for you, to help you, perhaps to go to the judge and plead on your behalf. Perhaps you would ask the Christians to march as a public gesture in order to “twist the arms” of the governor or judge. What would you write, knowing these may be your last words: “SOS”; “Help!” “Save me”!

Well, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi “to rejoice!” This letter is written toward the end of Paul’s life, these are some of his final words to this church he has established, these precious people who have been so good to him and loved him as a Father in the faith. Paul very easily could have used this time in prison in a very unwise manner. He could have been worried about the church at Philippi: “Perhaps there was something I failed to do for them...something I forgot to say...perhaps the church will fold up and cease to exist because of something I did, or failed to do.” He could have been anxious for this church and for his life! He could have lacked faith and trust in God, wondering to himself: “But God, I started a church for you, this is how you repay me?” “God, do you care for me any longer?”

Ironically, Paul, the persecutor of Christians was now imprisoned himself by God’s good providence. Instead of anxiety and remorse, instead of gripping fear and selfish concern for himself, Paul rejoiced in his chains! These chains had been used by God to spread the gospel. Paul had already hung on a Philippian prison wall in order to establish the church, now he is in chains at Rome, trying to help this church stand firm. This letter of “rejoicing” and “peace” was written from Paul’s lonely and desolate prison! Yet from a prison came praise, prayer, and the peace of God that passes all understanding! (Remember: Acts 16:16-40, when Paul and Silas were hanging from a Philippian jail and singing God’s praises - they were rejoicing and a household was saved! Wow! What grace!

I. **Praise- Rejoice in the Lord Always, and again I say rejoice!** (impr- v.4)

A. We want to have an “attitude of gratitude. Jesus says that because of our redemption, “Blessed are we,” in the Sermon on the Mount! This is why we truly rejoice *in the Lord.*

1. When we *rejoice in the Lord* from our hearts, we show our gratitude and quiet trust in our Heavenly Father. We must never rejoice based on how we feel, but we must rejoice based on fact. What fact? The fact that Christ has stooped way down to us in order to redeem his people and save them from sin (cf Phil. 2).
2. We must also be careful that our rejoicing is not done merely externally, in an artificial manner. Some Christians say “praise the Lord” at the drop of a hat; they say this constantly with little or no reflection. We do not want to make the Name of the Lord “common” - we do not want to take the Lord’s name in vain. We want to rejoice from the heart and allow that to manifest itself in our prayers and communion with our Father. We want our rejoicing to bear fruit and good works, so that even unbelievers will see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven (cf Mt. 5).

B. Man was created to rejoice in the Lord- “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever!” Sin has made us complainers! We complain sometimes incessantly, even though God has given prayer to us in order to sustain us. Even though we know in our minds that God is good and just and holy, as well as providentially rules over us - -we still complain! This ought not to be! The Book of Revelation teaches us that the redeemed saints in heaven continually rejoice in the Lord - -this is our calling now because we have the Spirit!

1. People of God: If we just believed that God truly meant us good in all things, we would not complain or question him when “things do not go our way”! We ought to pray to “see God’s hand” present in every circumstance we find ourselves in! The true cure for complaining is rejoicing. Try to complain while you rejoice or try to rejoice while you complain - it is like trying to smile while frowning - they are opposed the one to the other (disclaimer: I am not talking about “keep-a-stiff-upper-lip-Stoicism”!).

C. Let your gentleness be known to all men! (impr- v.5a)

- What kind of *gentleness* is this? This is better understood perhaps as forbearance. It was originally an expression for the balanced, intelligent, decent outlook of men, in contrast to licentiousness. It is an expression that is opposed to such behavior as unbridled anger, harshness, brutality, and sinful self-expression. We are to let our behavior be known to all men.

D. Why? -Because the Lord is near (v.5b)

- What does this mean? *The Lord is near?* Spatially (near in space), or temporally (near in time)? Both. This verse has puzzled commentators throughout the history of the Church. It seems based on Paul’s underlying theology back in Phil. 3:20, 21, and his present speaking of the presence of God to us in his peace in Phil. 4:7, that Paul is being purposely vague. Notice in Phil. 3:20, 21; Paul says:

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself

- a. Jesus is close temporally (in time). He is coming back soon, because we are *eagerly awaiting for the Lord Jesus Christ.* But we are also now citizens in heaven, that is spatially (in space-where we are with Jesus). Also Paul says in Phil. 4:7: “the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ

Jesus.” This we will see shortly is by his Spirit- -that is, Jesus is near by his Spirit- -spatially.

b. So the phrase *the Lord is near* means that Jesus is near to us by his Spirit, as well as near to us by his coming again soon! This is great hope for the Christian, and a true encouragement to let our gentleness, or our moderation, or our equanimity be known to all men! The reason we do this is not out of fear, but out of gratitude for what Christ has done. His nearness also assures that we have nothing to be anxious about, sometimes the very reason why we are *NOT* gentle with all men.

- But Jesus is near to us also in our prayers. He ever intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father, he helps us by his Spirit to pray in our weakness, and we even pray in his name!

II. Prayer- *Be not anxious!* (impr- v.6a)

- Where does anxiety come from? Why does the world worry? Why do Christians worry? Simply: sin! Adam lived in a harmonious communion with his Creator before the fall. God and man lived together in union one with another. After man gave into the subtlety of the devil, after the fall, there was anxiety. In fact, Adam tried to hide from God when he was walking in the garden. Gen. 3:6-11:

6 So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. 8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where *are* you?" 10 So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." 11 And He said, "Who told you that you *were* naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"

- Adam was worried (as he should have been because of the pronouncement that God had made to him if he were to be disobedient)- -Adam was worried and anxious because of his in. He had lost communion with God. The harmonious, close love and fellowship that he had with God originally had been broken. Adam had every right to be worried and anxious. However, in Christ, the second Adam, he reconciles us to God and brings us back into communion with our Creator. Paul explains this in Rom. 5:1, 2:

1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

- What causes our worry and anxiety? Sins, put simply! Our sins, other's sins, etc. This is a fallen, sin-sick world. We need the comfort of God's word to teach us that he is our great God and Savior. Paul teaches us in our passage that we have a sin-conquering Savior - Jesus Christ, so we are to rejoice in him and be not anxious!
- Because Christ has accomplished this in his perfect obedience to the Father on our behalf and imputed to us his righteousness, we can now be confident in the Lord. Communion with God has been restored, therefore we are to rejoice *in the Lord*, that is in his accomplished work and perfect obedience to the Father! We have the ability to overcome our doubts, our fears, our worries, and our anxieties. Instead of anxieties, because we have been united with Jesus Christ, we have communion with the Living God again and we can pray! Prayer, rather than anxiety helps us as God's needy children to look away from ourselves to his providence and provision that he so lovingly supplies!

- A. So, rather (instead of anxiety), let your requests be known to God! (impr- v. 6a)
- Who's in control? All of God's fallen creatures, as well as those he has redeemed, worry and are anxious! Who is in control has been one of the great questions of the philosophers throughout history. Is it Chance? Fortune? The gods? Who's in control? Me? NO! You have every right to worry and be anxious if *you* are in control!
 - Anxiety brings fear - butterflies - lack of control - sweaty palms - red faces - shortness of breath - AND USURPS OUR HEARTS AND MINDS, WHILE SAPPING US OF OUR FAITH AND STRENGTH IN THE LORD~!
 - **Illustration:** In our anxiety, we create our own universes - alternate universes, or worlds - where we go alone in our minds to fear - to worry - to be anxious!
 - We fear the past: You know the "if onlys!" - "If I had only avoided that sin...!"; "If only I had had this particular father or mother..."; "If only I had become a Christian at an earlier age..." etc. *ad infinitum*.
 - We fear the present: You know the "what ifs!" - "What if this occurs at my job..."; "What if I do not succeed..."; "What if I am unfit for the task the Lord has given to me..."; "What if I fail and then am embarrassed!"; "What if people will not like me..." etc. *ad infinitum*.
 - We fear the future: You know the "I need to's!" - "I need to prepare for my future as best as I can because who else is gonna care for me?"; "I need to do this, do that, because if I do not, I will be lonely, poor, despised, and forgotten..."; "I need to plan now and save now or I might not have any money when I am old..." (Disclaimer: it is wise to save for the future, it is wrong to be *preoccupied* by anxiety about the future!).
 - Here's help for the past, present, and future: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!"
 - In prayer, our Great God and Creator, providentially rules and governs - sustains his creation and particularly his people because of Christ! In reality, we have *nothing* to worry about! By praying, we invoke the presence of both of God's *Providence* and his *Power*! Remember this:

"Anxiety and prayer are more opposed to each other than fire and water!"

- God's Providence: This is a big theological word to describe how God watches over and guards our affairs - from the smallest thing we do, to the greatest! Every aspect of our lives, nothing goes unnoticed by our Great God! In fact, he knows the very number of hairs on our head, and not even what we may think as an 'insignificant' bird, a sparrow, falls to the ground without our heavenly Father taken account of it. Also, of providentially ordering the falling of the sparrow in the first place.
- God's Power: This is God's power whereby he sustains us. We are weak creatures, and he upholds us by his mighty hand! As Paul would say to the Greek Philosophers, as they even knew as creatures made in God's image, "In God we live, move and have our being." God's power provides the help we need when we are anxious and worried. He gives to us the benefit and blessing of prayer so that we might not look to our own weak flesh, cling to any so-called strengths or assurances found in this world, but by turning our eyes and gaze upward, we might look to our heavenly Father for the assistance we need in times of trouble, weakness, fear, or insecurity. As Calvin says: "It is by prayer that we ask God to reveal himself as wholly present to us!"

- Remember: God has both the *will* and the *power* to take the best care of us! Jesus asked the people in the sermon on the mount: "Why do you worry, why are you anxious like the pagans? Your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask anything of him! Matthew 6:25-34:

25 Therefore I say to you, do not *worry* (anxious, cf. Phil. 4:6) 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? 26 "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 "So why do you *worry* (anxious, cf. Phil. 4:6) about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith? 31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.

B. How? Through prayer and petitions (supplications), with thanksgiving... (v. 6b)

- The *Lord's Prayer* in Matthew 6 is an example of "prayers and petitions" with "thanksgiving". Jesus teaches the "manner in which" his people are to pray. The prayer begins with an address to "Our Father Who art in Heaven." We joyfully and with thanksgiving pray, because where rejoicing and thanksgiving are found, there is no complaining, no anxiety, and no reason to worry at all. Why? Because we know who our Heavenly Father is...we know that he is good and only means good for us. We praise and rejoice and with thanksgiving pray, because we know that he will hear us, will grant our requests that are according to his will, and he will do only that which is for our good and his glory! This is what the Psalmist meant when he rejoiced in the Lord and said: "Delight yourselves in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart!" The Apostle Peter says it this way in 1 Peter 5:6-7:

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

- Paul has told the Philippians of God's great accommodation and humility to his people in the Person of Christ. In Philippians chapter 2, Paul has taught them that Christ took on real human flesh and he humbled himself to experience the most despicable death known to man. Surely the cross was a true reason for anxiety and worry and fear. But Jesus, our Lord, resolved to follow the Father's will. He said in anguish and what could have been overwhelming anxiety: "Not my will, but yours be done!" Prayer was the answer for Jesus' anxiety, it is the answer for our anxiety! In fact, it was ultimately in answer to Jesus' prayer that Paul continues in chapter 2 of Philippians: God raised Jesus from the dead, seated him at his right hand and every knee will bow...every tongue will confess, that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father!

III. **Peace- THEN: The Peace of God (rather than worry), the kind of peace which surpasses all understanding, shall keep (guard) you!**

A. What the peace of God is not.

- All men created in the image of God desire peace. Problem is, many of them define it in different ways and do not know truly how to attain it. What do men usually mean by

“peace” in this world? For some, it is to be left alone to do whatever their hearts desire (this was Adam’s problem when hiding from God in the garden)! It means for some, to acquire possessions and amass riches and wealth so that they can be assured that they will be safe and that their posterity will never experience poverty or lack anything. For some, it means to avoid strife and controversy at any cost, just so that they can live life without any trouble! This, however, is not the peace of God. Ironically, it is usually these desires that produce *anxiety* in man rather than peace! It is this idea of *peace* which makes us all fall into anxious situations and worries- - this is exactly opposite to God’s peace!

B. So, what is the Peace of God?

- Ultimately, this is the peace that God gives to his people because of our Lord Jesus! You see, it could be understood as “the peace as God has peace”, but in the Greek, it is the peace which God gives (e.g. “Will of God”- God’s will; “Judgment of God”- God’s judgment). Now what we do not want to miss is this: Paul does not say peace, then prayer, then rejoicing - that is usually the way the world thinks in terms of peace (even as Christians we are guilty of only praying and rejoicing over what God has done when we *feel like it* - -that is, when we have peace).
- However, peace is a result of rejoicing *in the Lord* and prayer *to the Lord*. That is, it comes not first, but last. Rejoicing and praying precede the peace of God that comes and guards our hearts and mind in Christ Jesus.
- The peace of God is ours because Christ has provided us *peace with God*. As our Romans 5:1 passage taught us earlier. This reconciling work of Christ restores the harmony and communion that was lost in the fall- - the fall that caused us to be anxious and worried as creatures in this world.
- Illustration. Think about it: fish are created by God to be in the environment of the water. In other words, they “fit in”. They do not disobey God’s will to them, they are *fish*, and *act like fish*. Humans are the only creatures of God, that disobey and try to suppress the truth of who they are. Man is a creature, made to live in communion with God. The world is his place, yet he does not *fit in*. Until regenerated by God’s gracious Spirit, man tries to deny that he is a creature. He tries ultimately to be something he is not. No wonder he has no real peace, the peace of God. He is living out of harmony with his Creator. He lives in God’s world as a creature, yet denies it. No wonder man experiences meaninglessness like that found in the Book of Ecclesiastes. When all he experiences *under the sun* is not lived in light of the Creator who has made him for his glory! Man cannot know peace without knowing the Creator. The bumper sticker is right that says: “Know Jesus, Know peace; no Jesus, no peace.”
- Paul speaks of this *peace of God* elsewhere. In Romans 15:13, Paul defines his prayer and wish for God’s Kingdom people. He says:

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit

Paul even defines the characteristics of God’s Kingdom this way in Romans 14:16-19:

16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things *is* acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

- Our Lord Jesus promises his peace by the Spirit in John 14. Two things to know about Jesus' peace: (1) It is not as the world gives peace; (2) It is a victorious and everlasting peace. Think back to v. 5: "The Lord is near"- how? By his Spirit that he has promised to his people. In John 14:26-27 we read:

26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. 27 "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

C. Guard what? Your hearts and minds *in Christ Jesus!* (v. 7)

- Guard: This is an the idea of guarding, keeping, protecting. In Paul's day it would have been understood by the Philippians as the guard or sentry that stands at a fortress. The peace of God is a sentry in the metaphor, or a guard, who guards the Christian's mind and heart. These are the seat, the fount of all the thoughts and emotions of a person. These two places are where the world says things that supposedly "cannot break your bones" but does an incredible amount of damage sometimes! The peace of God (the kind that surpasses all of our understanding) guards your minds from being overwhelmed by the sudden onrush of anxiety, leading to fear, and even temptations not to trust our good heavenly Father.

Conclusion

- This passage teaches us what we need to do in opposition to our sinful pattern of worry and anxiety. Our sin symptom is worry and anxiety - -our God-given and provided cure through his word are praise, prayer, and peace. Think about it:
 - 1) Worry/ Anxiety comes to haunt you (as it will) begin by praise. *Rejoice in the Lord!* It is impossible to be anxious when you rejoice in the Lord!
 - 2) Worry/Anxiety comes to haunt you: continue in prayer. *Let your requests be known to God!* It is impossible to be anxious when you are praying and letting God know your needs, the needs he already knows you have.
 - 3) Worry/Anxiety comes to haunt you: allow God's peace to guard your hearts and minds. This is God's peace that he brings to you because you have been reconciled to him by Jesus your Savior. You can once again live this life, united to Christ, living in harmonious communion with your God.

We today will pass through many struggles. We will be weary and with little faith at times. We will be anxious and worried about everything, it will seem at times. But we can be assured that because of the Person and Work of Christ on our behalf, we truly have a reason to rejoice in the LORD! We have a true peace that passes our understanding, knowing that the God who raised Christ Jesus from the dead is the God we seek in our prayers and petitions.

We can know that this God is a God who cares and loves and seeks only our best! It is because we are united with Christ, reconciled to the Father in a harmonious relationship, that we have true peace! This truth must always be foremost in our understanding and lives. By faith, we must allow this truth to become an ever-present reality, knowing that indeed the Lord is near!

CRB