

Be Anxious for Nothing

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Let us read now in the New Testament in Philippians 4. The epistle of Paul to the Philippians 4.

1 Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. 2 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. 5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. 9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. 10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. 12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. 14 Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. 15 Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. 16 For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. 17 Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. 18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice

acceptable, wellpleasing to God. 19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. 20 Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 21 Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. 22 All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

May the Lord bless the reading of his precious and holy word to us.

Well, if we turn again, please, to Philippians 4, our text this morning comes in the words from verses 4 through 7. Philippians 4:4-7,

4 Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. 5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Dear congregation, after God finished the creation of the world, after he had created man, God looked at all that he had created and God said, "Behold it is very good." God rejoiced in his creation, angels sang for joy on the morning of creation, and man himself would have rejoiced at the goodness of God to him, and because there was no sin, there was a beautiful harmony among all the creation of God: between man and God; between man and themselves, Adam and Eve; man and himself, Adam's relationship with himself. There was in all of this a beautiful peace and a beautiful rest and a beautiful harmony, but when man sinned, this beautiful and good creation was left in ruin, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The peace that was there was now shattered. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. The joy that had been there was now turned into great sorrow. "Quickly," the psalmist says, "Quickly was my prosperous state turned into misery." Every relationship was broken between man and God, between man and woman and each other, and indeed the relationship in themselves was broken, and ever since it has been true that man that is born of a woman is a few days and full of trouble. Man that is born of a woman is a few days and full of trouble. They're born into trouble like the sparks fly upwards and there's not a person here this morning who doesn't know something of the trouble, the sorrow that has come, the misery that has come because of sin. There's not a person here who doesn't know something of what it is to have worry, to have anxiety, to, as we were singing, to be burdened with anxious care. You find this in the Psalms and therefore you find this in the experience of God's people too. Psalm 39, "Man lives in empty show, his anxious care is vain." The Psalm we were singing or Psalm 73, "Burdened with anxious care, I groped in dark despair." Psalm 77, "My heart inquired with anxious care, would God forever spurn, shall we no more his mercy see." Maybe that's the way that you've come into church this Lord's Day morning, you've come and you want to listen and you want to worship God and you want a blessing for your soul but what you find within yourself is that you are full of worry, full of anxiety, full of

anxious care, restless in your mind, distracted in your mind. Well, the word of God has something to say to you and to us all this morning.

Here Paul is writing to the church in Philippi from a prison in Rome. He is under a house arrest and he's writing to this church that he calls in verse 1 of this chapter his joy and his crown, a church that he loves deeply and cares for deeply, and there's a message here about the anxious care that they have and you can well imagine this situation that Paul finds himself in. He has been in prison in Rome for some time and one of these days he has this knock on the door, as it were, "There's somebody here to see you," and it's Epaphroditus, it's a man who has come all the way from Philippi over land and sea, and how happy Paul would have been to have seen this friend from such a far off place, from Philippi, how he would have embraced him, how they would have sat down and Paul would have asked Epaphroditus how things were going in Philippi. The place that Paul had gone to first when the Gospel went into Europe, you can well imagine Paul saying, "Tell me how are things in Philippi. How is my friend, the jailer? How is Luke? How is Lydia? How are Syntyche and Euodias doing?" And maybe Epaphroditus, you can imagine him saying something like this, "Well, for the most part things are going well. We can't complain, but we do have our worries, Paul. We do have our concerns and indeed to be perfectly honest, it has been a stressful time. Mrs. God-fearer, she has passed away. Mr. Strong in Faith, he's weak now and he can't attend the means of grace with us. The authorities are clamping down. They say, the word on the street is that soon we are going to have to say that Caesar is lord or we will not be able to worship, and we're not sure what's going to happen with our homes and our jobs, and really it's all a tremendous worry for us. In church, things for the most part are going well, we're still singing the Psalms, the word is still being read, the word is still being preached, but there is this conflict between Euodias and Syntyche and the people are starting to take sides and it's threatening our unity, it's threatening our peace. Actually, Paul, you are one of our biggest worries and concerns. We don't know what's going to happen. We haven't had word what is going to happen to you. We can't bear the thought of losing you, Paul, and really it's all a tremendous worry."

In many ways, this helps us understand the very first words of the letter that we have in chapter 1, the first thing that Paul told them, "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ," and how throughout this letter, Paul has been calling the Philippians to, as it were, look away from themselves and to focus and anchor their minds upon the Lord Jesus Christ. How often you find that message in this book, "Look not every man on his own things but every man on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." And now then as he comes to the close, this last chapter of this letter, he addresses perhaps more pointedly than before this issue of anxiety, of anxious care, of excessive worry, and in these verses we see verses 4 through 7, we see three antidotes that Paul gives for this anxious care, and it's bound up with three relationships. First of all, in verse 4 you have the upward relationship to Christ, 'Rejoice in the Lord.' The upward relationship to Christ. Secondly, you have the outward relationship to others, verse 5, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." And then

thirdly, there is the inward relationship to ourselves, "Be anxious for nothing but pray," verses 6 through 7.

So let's firstly hear look at the upward relationship to God, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Now this letter to the Philippians, some have said, is written in the atmosphere of joy. Paul is in prison, Paul can't preach the Gospel in the streets of Rome and yet there is a joy that permeates this letter. It's something Paul has spoken about often and repeatedly. You have it in chapter 1, verse 4, right at the beginning he says, "I pray for you with joy." Verse 18 of chapter 1, Paul speaks about when he hears of some preaching Christ this way, some out of pretense, some are doing it in truth, but he says, "Either way, I will joy because and I will rejoice because Christ is being preached." In chapter 2 and verse 2, he speaks of their unity, "Fulfill ye my joy by being like-minded." And in chapter 2 he goes on in verse 17 and 18, he speaks of how he joys and rejoices with them even when the prospect of death is before him, he can say this, he is joying in their work of service towards him. Chapter 3, verse 1, he says, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." It's something Paul is speaking to time and again in this book, but by the time you get to chapter 4 and verse 4 and Paul saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always," you can almost at this point anticipate an objection that comes. It's as though you could imagine Epaphroditus thinking or maybe even saying, "But Paul, have you not listened to what I have said? Maybe I didn't make myself clear. These things that are happening, this great threat that is there in Philippi, if only you knew the situation, you couldn't speak like this." But Paul, as it were, anticipates that objection because he repeats the command again, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." And this is a command. This is as much a command as any other in the Scripture. "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Honor thy father and thy mother. Thou shalt not kill." Here is another, "Rejoice." It is an imperative, "Rejoice in the Lord always."

But you ask, as maybe Epaphroditus would ask, "But how is that possible? How is it possible when all things around me and maybe within me and in my own soul's experience even seems to be crumbling? There are times when I feel sad and depressed and you have a down day, is this not setting the bar too high?" Well, we have to understand that the kind of joy that Paul is speaking about, it's not primarily about our emotion, Paul is not simply speaking about a feeling of happiness, this joy is not simply the opposite of sadness. It's certainly not Paul in any kind of superficial and flippant way, like we often hear today, Paul is not saying, "Well, just hang in there." He's not saying, "You need to smile more." It's not like the kind of flippant superficial bumper-sticker you might see today that says, "Don't worry, be happy." It's not the kind of superficial song that says, "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands." What if I'm not happy? What if I don't know it? What if I don't want to clap my hands?

And we have to remember that as Paul wrote these words, they were very likely still tears flowing down his cheeks. At the end of chapter 3, Paul had said that he wrote this letter weeping, weeping because of the enemies of the cross of Christ, "I write this even weeping. They are enemies of the cross of Christ, their end is destruction, their god is their belly." This is a joy that is not primarily about our emotion, it is not either dependent on our circumstances. That is a hugely important point to grasp. It is not a joy

that is dependent on our circumstances. Would Paul have been joyful if this joy that he was speaking about was based upon his own condition? He's in a prison. He is chained to one of the Praetorian guard. He is not able to preach the Gospel on the streets of Rome. People are saying things about him in Rome. He has the possibility of the death penalty by that wicked Emperor Nero. What happens, then, we ask to this joy when you have a bad day, when outward circumstances seem to suggest that there should be no joy? Even things like your car breaking down or failing an exam or getting that news from a doctor, the bad news, or when someone who loves you leaves you or dies, does the joy disappear?

What a wonderful thing, this joy is not produced by the circumstances around me. The key words here are these, "Rejoice in the Lord." In the Lord. Here is the sphere of this joy. This is a joy that depends on God. This is a joy that anchors itself in the unchanging God, in the faithful covenant God, and the closer we come to this God, the more we know him, the more we love him, the more deeply we will draw from him who is the fountain of joy. This is a joy the world cannot give you and it's a joy the world cannot take from you. John Newton had it right, "Fading is the worldling's pleasure/All his boasted pomp and show/Solid joys and lasting treasure/None but Zion's children know."

And when the Philippians sit there and listen to this letter that Epaphroditus has brought them from Paul, they knew this to be true of Paul. They were have been some there who would have said, "Remember that when he came to us at the first," you can read about this in Acts 16 when he first came there and they were, the people, the magistrates in Philippi treated him and Silas so harshly and cruelly and threw him into prison and put him in chains, and the circumstances were so appalling there and yet what do we read there in Acts 16:25? "At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." And since then, Paul has gone through appalling conditions. You can read about them in 2 Corinthians 11: deaths oft, the perils of the sea, perils of robbers, perils of my own countrymen. It seems this huge catalog of suffering and, yes, these things had shaken Paul, he was human, but it had not shaken his joy in the Lord. The Lord was still there. The Lord was still true. His covenant had not been shaken. His promises were still there. The blood was still there that cleansed from all sin. And Christ is still coming again. The joy is in the Lord and so he says in 2 Corinthians 6:10, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

So this upward relationship to God, "Rejoice in the Lord always," but then secondly, there is the outward relationship to others, verse 5, "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." If I have joy that is in the Lord, it is from above, then that is going to affect how my relationship with others around me. If my joy is self-centered, if it's in me, if it's all about me and my emotions and all we have is the 10 steps to a joyful life, then that is also going to affect how I view others in a very different way.

Here Paul says, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." The word "moderation" is a word that speaks of gentleness, reasonableness, patience, forbearance. It's a word that speaks about relationship with others. It's a word that implies a conflict. Why do you need patience, why do you need self-control, why do you need reasonableness except that

there is some conflict and that's what we see here in chapter 4 in the first few verses. There's this conflict between these two ladies, Euodias and Syntyche, and it's causing division and here Paul, then, is calling them to moderation, to patience, to reasonableness, to this moderation that will prevent this kind of conflict.

Now Paul is not saying just be a pushover. He's not saying let people ride on top of you. He's not saying don't hold any convictions. Not at all, but what he is saying is this: don't be easily annoyed. Don't be soon angry. Don't be a serial complainer or fault-finder. Don't run to extremes. Don't insist and press your own rights all the time. Hand your reputation over to Christ, he is saying. Check your temper. Hold yourself back. Judge charitably. Overlook offenses when you are able. That's what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:4 in that great chapter on charity, Gospel love, "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth," and so on.

"Let this be known," Paul is saying. "Let this be known to all men. What do you want to be known for?" Young people here, we ask you this, and old people too, but young people, what do you want to be known for? How do you want your peers to think about you? What do you want them to know most about you? That you're funny? That you're witty? That you're intelligent? That you're good-looking? That you're good at sport? That you're wealthy? Do you want people to know about your family tree and about your church connections? Do you want people to know that you are a holy person? Is that what you want to communicate to others? "I want to be known as a prayerful person. I want to be known as a holy person." Be known, Paul says, for gentleness. Be known for having patience. Be known as a reasonable person. Let your moderation be known.

Then he says, "The Lord is at hand." Commentators go back and forth, is he speaking to the Second Coming, the fact that Christ is coming again? The Lord is at hand. The Lord is coming again. Certainly the thought of Christ coming again in judgment and the fact of us appearing before him, if we would keep that in mind, then certainly that would affect our relationships to God and to others. I think here, my own thought here is that this is he's speaking more personally. "The Lord is at hand. The Lord is near. When all other men forsook me," he says, "the Lord was near, the Lord was at hand," and how that tempers, how that moderates us when we are conscious of the Lord and we think of what he was like, the mind of Christ. The Lord is at hand.

Let's thirdly now look at the inward relationship to ourselves. There's another command here. Paul says, "Be careful for nothing." It's a good translation. Don't be full of cares. It's the idea of anxious care because there are good cares, there are things we should care about. The Bible speaks about this. In 1 Corinthians 7:32, the married man careth for the things of his wife and she careth for the things of the husband. Paul has already said in chapter 2:20, he spoke about Timothy and he said, "I've no man who will naturally care for you." This was a good thing.

But there are bad cares, the Scripture speaks about. Christ in the Sermon on the Mount says, "Take no thought for your life." It's the same word, "Take no care, no anxious care, no thought for your life, what you shall eat or drink nor yet for your body, what you shall put on." Then he says in Matthew 6:27, "Which of you by taking thought," which of you by care, it's the same word, which of you by anxious care "can add one cubit unto his stature?" We've often thought of that in terms of height. You can't by your anxiety add any height to you, but it's quite plausible that what the Lord is saying there is, "Which of you by taking thought can add to your life? Will anxiety and care, will it help add to your life?" And it won't. It's useless. It's worse than useless. Christ speaks about, "When they deliver you up to magistrates, take no thought for what you will speak. Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things."

And again here, this is not, this is not the kind of bumper-sticker that says, "Don't worry, be happy." It's not the kind of philosophy we get today that says, "Que sera, sera. Whatever will be, will be." It's not the things that the world sings about. I remember hearing about this song that spoke about a monkey on your back and the song supposedly was meant to help people who were struggling with depression, and there was this repeated refrain, "It's alright. It's alright. Everything's going to be alright." But is it? It is going to be alright? We're gonna see that in a moment, without Christ, it's not.

But what Paul is saying here is as Christians we ought not to have that anxious care, that crippling care, that paralyzing anxiety. What does it communicate, Paul says? It communicates it's as though you don't have a Father in heaven who is ordering all things together for the good of his people. It is as though there is no covenant mercy. It is as though there is no covenant love. It is as though God has forgotten to be gracious. And really it's, at the root of it, it's a self-sufficiency. It's a self-sufficiency and a pride. It's, "I need to know." It's, "I need to understand everything. I need to be in control of everything. I need to know what he said. I need to know what she said." And Paul is really saying here, "Is it not enough that we know that our Father in heaven knows?"

But Paul doesn't just say be careful for nothing and leave us there like the world does, but he gives this antidote of prayer. One of the church fathers said, "Care and prayer are as mutually opposed as fire and water." Care, anxious care cannot breathe, as it were, in the atmosphere of prayer. It's hard to pray though, isn't it, when we're full of cares but we're called, like Peter says, to cast all our care upon him because he careth for you.

Be anxious for nothing, "but in every thing by prayer." This is the word that speaks about our coming to God, our adoration, our recognizing God for who he is. Like a child coming to a father, you're asleep at night and you wake up and you hear these noises and it's very dark and you're afraid and you have this care, this anxiety, and maybe you remember crying and your dad or mum would come and they'd speak to you. Well, the darkness was still there, wasn't it? The noises were still there outside, but when you hear your father's voice, when you hear your mother's voice, it gives a settledness. And so Paul is saying, "By prayer when you go to God, when you pray to your heavenly Father and you hear his voice, oh, what a calm it gives."

Then by supplications. That's a word that speaks of the earnestness, the persistence, the importunity men ought always to pray, "Day and night, I cry to thee."

Then with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is when we thank God for what he has done. The purpose is not to remind God who knows everything, but think of what it does for us when we thank God for what he has done. We remember what he has done. And how often you read that in the prayers and the Psalms, "This is what the Lord did. This is what he did when we were in great distress. This is what he did when Pharaoh was behind us and the Red Sea was in front of us. This is what our Lord did. This is what he did when the enemy was too strong for us." And in thanksgiving we remember what the Lord has done and that ought to take away the care and the anxiety.

Then we have our requests and that gets down to the specifics. We don't just pray in general. We can pray in general, we can ask the Lord to bless us, but requests speak about specific things. The sin that you is besetting you, that seems to be around you, that never leaves you, you take that sin, you name it and you bring it before the Lord and make your request known to him.

"In everything," Paul says. There was a missionary in Africa who was attacked by a lion and cried out to God in prayer and the Lord spared him from the lion, and he went home, he said, and all night long he couldn't sleep because of a mosquito, and in the morning he felt convicted, he had prayed to the Lord for the lion but for the little mosquito he had not prayed. In everything big and small, take it to the Lord in prayer.

And here's the promise, verse 7, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." Isn't this the problem with anxiety, with anxious care? Is the problem not often we want to understand everything? We don't want something that passes understanding, we want to know it all, but here is a peace Paul is speaking about, that passes all understanding. "The peace of God," he says, "will keep your hearts and your minds."

Now the word there "keep" is the word for garrison, and Philippi, you remember, was a Roman colony. It belonged to Rome. It had Roman law. It had Roman protection. It had a Roman guard around it, a garrison, and it's as though Paul is now saying, "I want to tell you about a garrison. I want to tell you about a protection, the kind of protection that Elisha knew he had when the whole army of Syria was around them and his servant was trembling and he said, 'Lord, open his eyes,' and his eyes were opened and he saw the chariots of God around them garrisoning them."

Paul is saying, "The peace of God, not the Pax Romana but the peace of God will garrison," and what will it keep? What will it protect? Oh, we talk about our need for home insurance or protection or financial insurance and protection, health insurance and protection, and these things are all fine in their place, but look at what Paul is saying is in great need of being garrisoned and protected, your heart and your mind. Keep your heart with all keeping for out of it are the issues of life.

And here in application, we want to, again, highlight these critical words at the end there, "through Christ Jesus." Through Christ Jesus. Without Christ, there is no peace. Without Christ, there is no joy, not this joy. Without Christ, my dear friend, if that's where you are this morning, you should be anxious and you should have care. You ought to care for your soul as we care for our bodies by eating and drinking. We ought to care for our never-dying soul and we should have a great concern.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and even to God's people that command comes, that warning comes in Hebrews 4, "Let us therefore fear," let us have an appropriate concern, "lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." But what we are to do here is, and what you are to do if this is where you are without Christ, is you are to take your care and this fear to the Lord Jesus, through Christ Jesus.

This letter has been pointing continually to the Lord Jesus Christ and you think of him and you think of the Savior and how he was careful for nothing in the sense Paul speaks about. There he was in the ship and there was a storm buffeting and the disciples were anxious and had the great care, and they came and they say, "Master, don't you care? Carest thou not that we perish?" They found him sleeping. They found him in peace. There was already a great calm in his soul before there was a great calm in the sea. When you think of Gethsemane and all the agony and the pain and the legitimate concern that there was there, and what did the Lord do? He prayed, we read, the more earnestly, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." He was careful for nothing.

And then you think of his moderation. "Let your moderation be known unto all men," and think of the Lord Jesus, how his moderation, his reasonableness, his patience, how it was known. Paul can write to the Corinthians, "I beseech you by the meekness and by the gentleness of Christ." That is what was known. When he was reviled, how was he known? When he was reviled, he reviled not again. When he suffered, how was he known? When he suffered, he threatened not but committed himself unto him that judges righteously. How he was conscious that the Lord was near, that his judgment was near, and that he will judge righteously. He was conscious of the nearness of the Lord. He could even say at Gethsemane, "Don't you know that even now I could command 12 legions of angels?" But, no, his moderation was known unto all men.

His humbling of himself was what he was known for and all for the eternal good of others, and how the joy of the Lord was his strength. Psalm 16, which is messianic, the Lord says there, "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand," because he is near, "I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope."

And you think of the Lord Jesus and he was the faithful witness and he spoke of judgment. He does that in Matthew 11. He speaks of the woe that is coming upon Capernaum, and the woe that is coming upon Bethsaida, and the woe that is coming upon

Tyre and Sidon. We don't read of him rejoicing in that but he was faithful in that, but by the end of the chapter we do read of him rejoicing. It tells us that he rejoiced in his spirit. And why? Because he was then going to say, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." That is what he rejoiced in, the joy of the Lord, his strength.

So we are all to come to Calvary and to see there the place, yes, a place of great sorrow and pain, but the place from which flows a river of life that makes the city of God glad. You are to take your anxieties here. You're to take your burden here. You're to take your soul here. You're to take your lostness here if that's where you are this morning, and you're to find here the peace that passes understanding. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Paul asks. What manner of anxiety, what manner of care can separate from the love of Christ when you see it especially at Calvary? "Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword?" Even death itself? Yes, sinner, take your lost soul here. Take the burden of your lost soul here and here make request for mercy and for peace, and you will find there joy from above, moderation to all men, and a great peace within. Amen. May the Lord bless his word.

Let us pray.