

Philippians 4:1-7

Overcoming Anxiety

Be careful for nothing...v. 6

We've seen in our studies of this chapter so far that the exhortations Paul gives to the Philippians are not just random thoughts that come off the top of his head as he brings his epistle to a close. There is a practical connection between these various exhortations. One leads to another. So you could say that if we are going to stand fast in the Lord (v. 1) it becomes necessary that we rejoice in the Lord always. It makes sense doesn't it? Those early Christians, including the Apostle Paul could stand fast against all the forces that were against them because they could rejoice in a Savior who was living, who had risen from the dead, whose salvation, therefore, was certain.

And to the degree that we succeed in rejoicing in the Lord to that same degree we'll find the grace we need to let our moderation be known to all men. We won't, in other words, be so bent on having our own way or advancing our own opinions on secondary issues that we find it hard being charitable to others especially to other Christians. If you can rejoice in the Lord then letting your moderation be known to others will come quite naturally and spontaneously.

Unfortunately neither rejoicing in the Lord always or letting our moderation be known to all men comes naturally. Rejoicing may not be difficult when sailing through life is smooth and the winds are mild. The challenge comes when the winds of life are contrary and the sailing becomes difficult. Any unsaved person can rejoice when he enjoys health and wealth but take away the things of this world from him and he'll have no trouble cursing God to his face.

The key for the Christian is that he rejoices *in the Lord* which means that he, like Paul, is able to see above this world and beyond this world so that he can affirm that even when things contrary to his comfort and ease happen to him he can still, by faith, affirm that the gospel is advancing and he can still view circumstances in such a way that he knows and believes that to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Verse 6, however, brings our attention to the thing that often looms large in the believer's life and keeps him from rejoicing as well as keeps him from manifesting moderation. Notice how this verse begins with the first negative exhortation in this chapter. Here's something the Christian is definitely not to do. It's a negative exhortation but it's stated positively in the AV when we read *Be careful for nothing*.

This is one of those words in the AV that has come to take on a different meaning over time. We generally think that it's a good thing to be careful as opposed to being careless and so in today's English you might think on the surface of it that Paul is saying don't be careful but be careless – or – don't be cautious but be wreck less. That's obviously not what Paul has in mind. What he means, rather, by the word *careful* is to not be *full of care*.

The word means literally *to be anxious*. Don't be anxious. Another version translates it *do not be anxious about anything*. This version brings out the fact that this is a negative exhortation. *Be careful for nothing* or *Do not be anxious about anything*. I think it's important to understand what Paul is saying and what he's not saying. He's not suggesting that the Christian should not be concerned about anything. There's a big difference between being concerned and being anxious. The failure to be concerned would make you careless. There are many things we do well to be concerned about especially in a world that is filled with sin and sorrow.

Our Supreme Court has ruled against God's view of marriage. No small wonder they would rule against God's view of marriage when they've ruled years ago against God's view of life which decision follows another earlier decision in which they ruled against God himself being prayed to in our public schools. We're aware of such things as these and we're certainly concerned for such things as these as they pertain to our lives and our children and our nation. But the thing we must not do and the thing that can kill your joy and hamper your ability to show forth your moderation is that condition of heart and mind in which you find yourself dominated by the cares of this world.

How often we all, as Christians, fit the Martha profile to whom Christ said *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things*. *Anxious and troubled* another version puts it; *worried and bothered* yet another version reads. The irony in Martha's case is that it was even while she was in the presence of Christ that she was dominated by things that made her anxious and troubled. You might sympathize with her if Christ was far from her but he was near at hand even in the same room. The same thing holds true for you as a Christian. You have the promise of his presence and yet it's often times true of you that the presence of Christ, notwithstanding, you are anxious and troubled and worried and bothered about many things.

Anxiety, then, is like a crippling disease to the Christian. It robs him of his spiritual vitality and it deprives him of his testimony for Christ and it's something, therefore, that must be overcome. And so what I'd like to do this morning is to take a closer look at this condition of anxiety. It's definitely a condition that can rob you of much. It's with good reason that Paul writes in v. 6:

Be careful for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made know unto God.

In analyzing this text I'd like you to consider with me first of all that we find in it:

I. A Hindrance to Overcome

I've described that hindrance to you already. It's the hindrance of anxiety. *Be careful for nothing; Do not be anxious for anything*. In describing this hindrance further I would have you note how common such a thing is even among some of the most eminent saints of God and followers of Christ.

Perhaps the most prevalent example of a people dominated by the cares of the world would be the children of Israel in the wilderness following their miraculous and powerful deliverance out of Egypt. When Christ said in the sermon on the mount that the subject of his Kingdom should take no thought for what he would eat or what he would drink or what he would wear he touched upon the very things that dominated the children of Israel in the wilderness.

How often they strove with Moses over those very things in spite of the way they had been delivered out of Egypt. They illustrate a truth that the people of God often times forget which is that the Christian life, having begun supernaturally is a life that is to continue supernaturally as the Christian walks by faith and learns to prove the Lord not one time but on a daily basis.

The order of the day for the Christian is to pray *Give us this day our daily bread*. But too often the Christian has in mind *Give us this year our yearly bread* or *give us our monthly bread* or *at least give us our bread a few weeks in advance so our minds can be somewhat at ease that we'll have thy provision, O Lord*.

And let's face it – we have lived in a culture and in a nation that has made it possible to pull down our barns and build bigger ones so that we may store up our goods for an extended period of time and say, as that man in Luke's gospel says in Lk. 12:19 *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*. But the moment we dip into those goods laid up for years and that supply dwindles and we lose the ability to keep it full then we grow anxious about the future saying *What shall we eat or what shall we drink or wherewithal shall we be clothed?*

Perhaps the most difficult challenge we face as Christians is illustrated from that passage we read earlier in the service from Exodus 14. There you find the children of Israel backed into a corner, so to speak. The sea is before them and the Egyptian Army is advancing upon them and their way seems hedged in and their doom seems certain. And so they cried unto the Lord himself and they complained to Moses, God's servant, as if he was the one responsible for their plight. And v. 15 indicates that Moses himself was most anxious when the Lord says to him *Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward...*

Here is the time to worry, then, so it would seem. When the Lord has told you to go forward and your desire is to go forward but the way forward is impossible, at least to the eye of the flesh. And isn't this where we often times perceive ourselves to be as a nation? We're surrounded by a hostile world in which our President would foist his ungodly values upon the people of God, and our legislature would throw the security of our borders to the wind and our judicial system would sanction that which is abominable and ban that which is virtuous and the child of God finds himself so dominated by these things that he feels himself being cornered into situations that are increasingly difficult and can only be viewed as becoming difficult beyond measure for his children given the present trajectory of ungodliness.

I said a moment ago that even the most eminent saints find themselves overcome with worry. I don't know that you could call that generation of Israelites in Exodus 14 the most eminent saints. But what about David in 1Samuel? Here was a man after God's own heart, a man of courage and a man of faith but he was also a man of worry.

1Sa 27:1 And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: [there is] nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand.

Do you see how worry triumphed over faith in this instance in David's life? The Lord had already delivered him from the hand of Saul on two previous occasions. Indeed Saul had been delivered into his hands but rather than concluding that Saul could never touch him which would have been the argument of faith he instead concluded that Saul would eventually prevail which was the reasoning of worry and fear.

I could cite other examples to you – there's the example of Elijah who called down fire from heaven in 1Kings 18 but in 1Kings 19 you find him so gripped with anxiety that he despairs of life itself. In his case the thing that brought him to such depths was the fact that God hadn't moved the way he thought God would and should move. He had preconceived ideas in his mind of what the advancement of God's cause should look like and when his notions didn't come to pass he sank into despair and wanted to die.

In that respect you could say that Jonah resembled Elijah. He too had preconceived notions about what God should do and when God didn't do as he thought he should do by destroying the city of Nineveh in judgment then he also despaired of life. And so we begin to trace a pattern as to what contributes to anxiety or the Christian being full of care. He has certain ideas in his mind pertaining to what God must do and when God doesn't yield to him then he becomes fretful and filled with anxiety.

What, then, does being full of care or being anxious look like? It looks like fretting over what the future holds, or it looks like a countenance that announces to others that you're weighed down with a heavy burden, perhaps even pacing the floor, while wringing your hands or staring into space with a blank and forlorn look. Or it looks like Martha in Lk. 10 who is busy but not restful.

It's no wonder Paul must issue such an exhortation to be careful for nothing. Anxiety saps the vitality out of a Christian. It's a little bit, I suppose, like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress. In the beginning of the story he has the burden of guilt on his back but he eventually discovers the truth of the gospel and appropriates the truth of Christ's atoning death and loses that burden. But it would seem that when a Christian frets and worries and becomes anxious and full of cares there's a sense in which you could say that he's found a way for strapping a burden back on his back that God never meant for him to carry.

Needless to say, then, anxiety is a hindrance that must be overcome. There's too much at stake for the Christian's witness and well being for him to be so weighed down and full of care. You cannot rejoice when you're full of care. You cannot show that moderation to all

men that you're called upon to manifest when you're full of care. The word of God itself, according to Christ becomes unfruitful when the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke that word.

We've considered, then, the hindrance that must be overcome. Let's think next on:

II. What it Takes to Overcome Such a Hindrance

The text presents to us a very marked contrast between what the Christian is not to do and what he is to do. *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*

The contrast is marked by two things. The first is the contrasting word *but*. Be careful for nothing. Here's what you're to do instead – you're to engage in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. You're to let your requests be made known unto God. The second thing that marks the contrast in these statements are the words *nothing* and *everything*. When it comes to care – nothing; when it comes to prayer – everything.

Now I think it will aid you in your praying to note a few things about anxiety. I think it would be correct to say that overcoming anxiety must be the aim in your praying. In order to pray intelligently, therefore, against anxiety. You should know some of the root causes for that anxiety.

One such cause is placing undue value on the things of this world. I had an interesting experience over this weekend in terms of being impressed with the magnitude of the contrast between affluence and poverty. My son has been doing his internship with a very large law firm here in Indianapolis. It seems that a good part of this internship includes golf outings, fancy restaurants, and invitations to the homes of rich lawyers. He was describing the home and the affluence of one of partners of this firm to me and needless to say it was way beyond anything I would ever hope to attain in terms of this world.

Earlier that evening at the Friday night fellowship held here at the church we watched the first of a series of DVD videos entitled "Dispatches from the Front." These are the accounts of Dr. Tim Keese of his trips to remote places in the world where he endeavors to encourage Pastors that are advancing the cause of Christ. This particular video focused on places in Southeast Asia – Cambodia and Thailand. As Dr. Keese himself notes these are places that exceed what we're even able to conceive of when we think of poverty.

One interview in particular was with a lady in a poor section of some city in Cambodia. This lady earns a living by gathering plastic bottles out of the trash and then taking them to the river to clean them. She can make about a nickel a pound of clean plastic which enables her to earn about a dollar a day. She's actually happy with her work because it's twice as much as she used to make. This lady is a Christian who, in addition to the work she does cleaning bottles in order to feed her son, also cleans the church each day where she worships Jesus. In the video she's seen stacking the chairs and she tells how she sweeps the floors and she donates this work to the church but not only donates it but refers to it as her *happy service*.

When I heard my son's description of that lawyer's house later after seeing this video I couldn't help but remark that the contrast between the two things couldn't be greater. The lawyer has everything and can buy anything. This lady in Cambodia has nothing and even less than nothing but there's something else she doesn't have either. She doesn't have the cares of this world. She's not distracted by the world's goods but is taken up instead with the love of Christ.

Now I'm not suggesting that having means to the world's goods is a sin or that there's merit in poverty. The point I am making is that placing undue value on the things of this present world will lead to you becoming full of care. It's for good reason that we're told by John not to love the things of this world. We are instead to focus on what has lasting value in terms of eternity.

When you pray, therefore, let your praying be focused on what you have spiritually. This is what will enable you to accompany every request you bring to God with an expression of thanksgiving. Think about it for a moment. God has given you his Son. God has given you everlasting life. Christ has gone to prepare a place for you and will return for you. When you think of all you've been given there isn't any way you can ask God for anything that is greater than what he's already given you.

So in your praying target the thing that would bring you to a state of anxiety. Target the things of this world and ask God to help you keep the things of this world and the circumstances of this world in their proper perspective. Ask the Lord for the things you need in this world. We're taught to do that. Christ told us to pray *Give us this day our daily bread*. And I think that petition includes our spiritual and our material needs. But ask the Lord also to give you the grace that will enable you to use the things of this world without abusing the things of this world. Seek him for the grace you need to keep the things of this world in their proper perspective so that you may be in the world without being of the world.

That's the first cause of anxiety, then – undue value of the things of this world. The second cause of anxiety and the thing that must also be targeted in your praying is a practical distrust of God. Doesn't worrying say to God – Lord, I don't know if you're aware of me. I don't know if you care about me. I don't know if you're able to see me through the difficulties and challenges that I face. Worry is what leads you to say that you must go it alone without God. You must, somehow, muster the strength in your power to meet the challenges that are before you.

This is nothing short of unbelief. And at the core of being full of care is nothing but unbelief. I sure am thankful for Psalms like the 77th Psalm. This Psalm teaches you how to approach God with your unbelief. You could say this is the expanded version of that petition of the distressed man in Mark's gospel who cries *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*.

Listen to these words from Psalm 77 – they may be speaking directly to what you're going through at this very time in your life. Beginning in v. 2 we read: *In the day of my*

trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. 3 I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. 4 Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. 5 I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. 6 I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search. 7 Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? 8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? 9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.

The answer of course to all these questions is of course not! God has not cast off and he hasn't stopped being favorable and his mercy is not gone and his promise doesn't fail and he never forgets to be gracious and he never shuts up his tender mercies. And the assurance we have of this is found in the cross of Christ. He has loved you so much that he's paid the price of his blood for you. He has redeemed you to himself. You belong to him. How could he possibly forget to be gracious? How could he possibly shut up his tender mercies?

The Psalmist traces the cause of why he asks these questions in v. 10 of Psalm 77. *And I said, This is my infirmity.* The word *infirmity* means *sickness*. This is my sickness and he's speaking of course about a spiritual sickness. It's the sickness of unbelief and it's unbelief that will lead you to the unhappy realm of being full of care. So target your unbelief in your praying. Ask the Lord to help you walk by faith rather than by sight. Ask the Lord to give you spiritual eyes that will enable you to see things in the right perspective which is God's perspective which is also therefore the perspective of eternity.

There is one more cause that I'll mention that leads to being full of care which is the neglect of your spiritual privileges – neglecting the means of grace in other words. It's no small wonder you would be full of care if you're spending time in the word or you're not spending time in prayer or you're not going to the Lord's house. I get a little concerned, you know, when I learn of those that are so under duress that they can't make it to church on Sunday. That's a little bit like having the doctor prescribe medicine to you that can heal you of some physical ailment but you don't take the medicine because you're too sick to take it.

You must utilize the means of grace to prevent anxiety or you must utilize the means of grace to gain the victory over anxiety. Another thing to focus on in your praying: Focus on the truth that among the things that Christ has borne for you is the very grief that weighs you down. I hadn't really thought on this before but in Isa. 53:3,4 we're told that *Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.*

This is why we can cast all our care on him (1Pet 5:7) because he has borne our cares already and he has atoned for all the sins that are connected with those cares. Could I suggest as well in your praying that you focus on how valuable you are to Christ? It is while addressing the topic of worrying that Christ says in Mt. 6:26 *Behold the fowls of the*

air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

You are more valuable than many sparrows you are more valuable to God than anything in this world. You are valuable enough to him to lead him to become one of you in order to redeem you to himself by his atoning blood. *Be careful for nothing* Paul writes. He doesn't say be concerned for nothing but be careful for nothing. Do not be anxious for anything in other words.

What a gracious alternative is given to you instead. Instead of being full of care, instead of being overborne by anxiety and fear and worry and fretfulness, go to the Lord in prayer. Take every concern to him but do it from the proper perspective. Do it from the perspective that you belong to him, that God is your heavenly Father and that you're an adopted son. Do it from the perspective of Ro 8:32 *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

If you'll go to him in prayer from this perspective then you'll be able to accompany every petition and request that arise from your concerns with your heart-felt expression of thanksgiving.

May the Lord indeed, then, enable you to overcome this dreadful and life choking malady of anxiety.