

Living in an Anxious World ~ Philippians 4:4-7
April 15, 2020 ~ Mercy Hill Church ~ Pastor John Ferguson

Intro: Anxious Times ~ We are entering into uncharted waters and can sense the storm brewing.

How does being a disciple of Jesus make a difference at a time like this? What resources are there for folks like us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that can help us right here and now?

Philippians 4:4-7 by Paul, himself a follower of Jesus applying the good news of Jesus to anxious followers of Jesus living in an anxious world.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

1. Remember who is saying this! Paul the Apostle — Paul languishing in prison facing death bc of Jesus.

- cf. 2 Cor 11:23-29, "...far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak?"

2. So when Paul calls us to rejoice, it's not an escapist strategy for dealing with the pain of this world. This is no stiff upper lip, grin and bear it theology. Rather, this is a way of being in this world that was forged in the fires of intense suffering and persecution. It is the lived experience of a flesh and blood person just like you and me who is anchoring his life in something bigger than his pain, his anxiety, his suffering. In Paul's mind, something has happened that has so fundamentally changed his view of the world that he can approach any situation and rejoice in it.

- What was that? The resurrection of Jesus.
- 1:20-21, "...it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." // It is a win-win situation.
- 3:12, "...Christ Jesus has made me his own."
- The resurrection of Jesus is the lens through which he views reality. It made a difference in the way that Paul dealt with this anxious world, and he thinks it ought to make a difference in the lives of his original audience. Let's hear him speak to us in our present situation as we find ourselves living in an anxious world with a virus spreading around the world, and let us hear him speaking to us this side of Jesus' empty tomb, *Rejoice in the Lord always—even in the face of a pandemic; again I will say, Rejoice.*

5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

1. This almost parenthetical statement reminds his readers that their lives as followers of Jesus are on display before an anxious world.

2. **“reasonableness” = gentleness; patience;** IOW, there is an appropriate response to life in an anxious world that you should display, that you should make known by the way you conduct yourself.
- NIV, “Let your gentleness be evident to all.”
 - CSB, “Let your graciousness be known to everyone.”
 - cf. Philippians 1:27, “...let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ....”

5 The Lord is at hand...; [That is, “The Lord is near.”]

1. That is, “The Lord is near.”

- He has not abandoned you; he has not forgotten you. How can he?
- Isaiah 49:14-16, “But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.’ “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands....”

2. **We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus.** Do you think Jesus went to the extreme depths of execution by way of crucifixion to lose his grip on you now? He rose again, and he now has the keys to life and death in his hands.

- Matthew 28:20, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- Hebrews 13:5, “...he has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

5 The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything...”

1. **Um...excuse me, Paul?** Do not be anxious about anything? Do you know what kind of world we live in?

- Q: Guess what one of the most common commands in Scripture is? A: “Do not be afraid.”

2. **Illustration: Place your fists in front of your face. Let your fists represent all your anxieties.** That’s all you can see. And if that’s all you can see, then it makes no sense to to say, Do not be anxious. But Paul and Jesus and all the wise sages and writers of Scripture are trying to get something else before your eyes. Or rather, Someone else. The Lord is near to you in the midst of all your anxieties.

6 ...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

1. **Prayer is a way of processing your life with God.** It is a way of processing your worries, your anxieties, your pressures, your burdens with God in the picture.

2. **Paul says we’ve got three Tools in our Toolbox:** (1) Prayer; (2) Thanksgiving, (3) Requests

- Paul assumes we are needy! So let that need drive you to God.
- NLT, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.”

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1. **The promise:** The peace of God, the peace that God gives — it surpasses all understanding — this peace will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- IOW, the peace which God gives comes gift wrapped in the person of Jesus Christ and all that God is for us in Him.
- John 14:1, 27, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

2. Doesn't mean you won't be buffeted by anxieties, but you've got the peace of God that goes to battle for you against your anxieties as you live in an anxious world.

3. Note: This peace is a gift that happens when we pray. Why? Because in prayer we are setting our hopes not upon changing circumstances, but upon our God who is with us no matter what the circumstances. B

Bottom Line: With God before you, anxiety never has the last word.

Application #1: Battle anxiety with the weapon of prayer-filled trust.

(1) What is your anxiety saying? In whom is your anxiety asking you to trust?

(2) Martyn Lloyd-Jones: "Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?"

(3) 2 Corinthians 10:5, "...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

- The Apostle spoke these words in a different context, but I think it can have application to us. We take our anxious thoughts and make them obedient to Christ. We take our emotional messiness and submit it to Christ. We will not be ruled by anxious thoughts or by out of control emotions. We will only be ruled by Christ. So when we feel anxiety and emotion, let's wrestle them to the ground and bring them to our Lord Jesus.

(4) Prayer is a declaration of dependence. It is a fierce and stubborn declaration saying, "I am not alone—this is my Father's world. Jesus gave his life for me to make me his own. I've been given God's own Spirit that indwells me and empowers me. Therefore I have hope in any situation."

- Psalm 56:3 & 8, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.... You have kept count of my tossing; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? ...This I know, that God is for me."

(5) We also need the encouragement and prayers of one another too. We're not meant to fight anxiety alone. Part of our calling as we live in an anxious world is to pray for one another. So let's call each other, text each other, meet with each other, and pray for each other.

[* Caveat, none of this is meant to communicate that there may not be times to consult medical experts too.]

Application #2: Know that this is a time of testing. Let your light shine.

(1) Living in an anxious world is always a time of testing, but there are times when it seems more acute.

- Let's remind ourselves of these words by Alan Redpath, British Pastor & Author last century, "There is no circumstance, no trouble, no testing, that can ever touch me until, first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ right through to me. If it has come that far, it has some with great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment."

(2) Living in an anxious world is also the perfect opportunity to put our faith in Jesus into action, but living out the new way of being human that Jesus died to give us.

- A few days ago, I heard someone report that they had gone to the store to pick up some supplies when she noticed an elderly couple sitting in their car motioning for her to come near. The elderly lady cracked her window and told how she and her husband needed some groceries, but had been sitting petrified in their car too afraid to go in the store. She then handed some money and a list of items to the stranger asking if she'd be willing to pick up some groceries for them. And she gladly did so.
- This is a reminder that we live in an anxious world, and many of our neighbors are scared. So let's be proactive knowing that anxiety visits all kinds of people. Let's check up on our neighbors, especially those who are in higher at-risk groups for getting sick, and let's serve our neighbors and community with courage as we have opportunity to do so.

(3) Galatians 6:9-10, "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

- No doubt, over the days and weeks to come, we will have opportunities to do good to everyone. Remember, we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. These are opportunities for good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do (cf. Ephesians 2:10). We have been born and reborn for this!

Application #3: Bank on God's grace for today.

(1) Lastly, I'm reminded of a time when the Apostle Paul prayed for God to remove something in his life that drove him to prayer. "But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" (cf. Romans 12:9).

- In other words, God didn't remove the circumstance that was giving Paul anxiety, but promised that his grace is sufficient for his life and ministry. In fact, God's desire was to amplify his power in Paul's weakness. Let this be a lesson for us as well.

(2) God promises and gives his grace for today. He will give tomorrow's grace when we arrive at tomorrow, next week's grace when we arrive there next week. God's grace will meet us in the future when encounter the future. But that grace is for then, and the grace he gives today is for us today.

**Mercy Hill Church, may God's ever-present grace and peace guard you this day,
and every day of your life, until the day when Christ returns and makes all things new!**