

Do Not Be Afraid . . . Peace Has a Pathway! (Part 2)

Introduction

Wrapping Back Around

- A. We are still in our “Do Not Be Afraid . . .” sermon series where we’ve been dropping into various texts throughout the Scriptures where God issues this command or others like it.
 - 1. And we’ve just been considering this idea of not being afraid from many various angles—how it’s possible, why we needn’t be, what replaces it, and so forth.
- B. And, if you were with us before Easter, you may recall, we were in a text there that I actually said we’d wrap back around this morning and revisit and close out some reflections. The text was [Phil 4:4-9](#).
 - 1. No doubt, for many of us, it’s probably the first text we ran to for refuge when all of this Coronavirus stuff started going down. Paul’s words here to this suffering church in Philippi have been shelter for weary souls throughout church history. And they are no less shelter for us here today.

The Text

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness [Gk. epieikes = “gentleness”] be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:4–9)

From Anxiety to Peace

- A. So the command that ties this text to our sermon series is there in [v. 6](#): “Do not be anxious . . .” which I said last time is very much the same as saying: “Do not be afraid.”
- B. And what we gather quite clearly from Paul’s emphasis in this text is that he wants to move us from a place of anxiety to a place of peace. While anxiety is in the background here, it is peace that is clearly both the focus and goal.
 - 1. So [v. 7](#) he speaks of “the peace of God . . . guard[ing] [our] hearts and . . . minds in Christ Jesus.”
 - 2. And in [v. 9](#) he speaks of “the God of peace” who will be with us.

- a. It's peace that he wants for us. He not only wants to rid us of anxiety, he wants to move us to a place of peace.
- C. And, the wonderful thing about this text here, is that he actually shows us how to do it. Anxiety and fear can often be such disruptive and disorienting experiences. When we're in the throes of them we often lose our sense of what's up our down, left or right, we get tangled and twisted up and can't find our way out even though we want to.
 - 1. So, Paul, knowing that, gives us quite clear steps here—what I called last time a “pathway.” Hence, the sermon title: “Do Not Be Afraid . . . Peace Has a Pathway!” There's a way out of anxiety, a way towards peace. You don't have to get lost in it all.
- D. As far as I can tell, Paul identifies for us three steps along this pathway: (1) Step #1: Pray (esp. v. 6); (2) Step #2: Ponder (esp. v. 8); and (3) Step #3: Practice (esp. v. 9).
 - 1. Last time we looked at the first one and a half really. We'll carry on in a moment, but I'll need to review some of that to get us back in the flow.

(1) Step #1: Pray (esp. v. 6) [Reviewed]

Turning the Monologue to Dialogue

- A. On this, last time I drew our attention first to the fact that we are always talking—not externally necessarily, but within ourselves. We are always interpreting and discussing and reflecting—chattering in our hearts: “What shall I say about this? What should I do here? What if this happens? What if that happens?” And so forth.
 - 1. And the unfortunate tendency of this inner monologue is to turn in on itself, where it creates this sort of feedback loop in the heart that grows more shrill and amplified in time. All of this is really what I called the “frequency of fret.” And, the fact is, we're often not even aware is playing out within us. It's the ever-present anxiety that has over time become our normal, our background noise.
 - a. But Paul is saying such a thing marauds our peace and we must do something about it. It doesn't need to be this way.
- B. So what you ask are we to do? Well, the first thing he tells us we must do, after we've tuned into it and actually become aware of it at all, is to start to turn that inner monologue towards a dialogue with our Creator, Redeemer, and Father. In other words: Pray.
 - 1. Orphans talk to themselves, figure things out themselves, because they are alone in this world, no one will care for them if they don't.
 - 2. But the Christian is not an orphan, though often we act like it. We have a Father to whom we can bring every care and every concern. Indeed, God is here inviting us to do so.

C. This idea really comes out most pointedly there in v. 6: “do not be anxious about anything [How Paul? What’s my first step away from this and towards peace?!], but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

1. The only way to not be anxious about anything is to talk to God about everything.

D. I wonder: How have you been doing at this in the past two weeks since we first considered it? Have you been catching yourself abuzz with that frequency of fret and turning that stuff outward and upward to God in prayer?

E. Now, that is Step #1, and Step #2 dovetails right into that, builds upon it, and takes us another step closer to the peace we all so desperately long for.

(2) Step #2: Ponder (esp. v. 8) [Continued]

From Praying to Pondering

A. Praying, in and of itself, is not enough. We can sound off in God’s direction, but unless we are interested in actual dialogue with Him, we shall not get very far.

1. You see, if we want to move towards peace we must not only lament to God, we must also listen to Him; we must not only give Him our tears, we must also give Him our ears; we must not only open our mouths to pray, we must also open our Bibles to read.

a. If we are not open to what He would say back to us after we have said our piece, well then we shall find ourselves just as stuck in anxiety as before.

B. No, we must let Him take us from praying to pondering.

1. And here’s what I mean. As we pour out our hearts in prayer to God, so long as we are open to it, He has this way of tuning us back into His own voice by the time we’re done. It’s as if He turns the dial as it were and we slowly begin to shift away from that frequency of fret to another station, one where we start to hear another sound, another voice . . . His!

a. It’s this interesting thing. We begin talking and we end up listening. We burden Him with all of our crushing anxieties, and in return He gives us all His buoyant, life-lifting promises. He leads us from what is scary and worrisome to what is good and true.

C. That is what Paul identifies next for us in v. 8: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

D. I just asked you to consider how you’ve been doing with Step #1. Have you been turning that inner monologue to dialogue with your Savior? Now I want you to take a moment and take inventory of your thoughts.

1. Consider where you've been setting your mind, what you've been thinking about, what you've been meditating upon. Obviously, these two are related. If you've not been praying, you've probably not been pondering good things either—things true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and so forth.
 - a. And Paul again is trying to help us here.

Sturdy Realities

- A. When trying to identify what exactly Paul is referring to here by this long list of words he piles up here, certainly we can say He must be referring to the sturdy realities put forward in God's holy Word in general. But I do think we can get a little more specific.
 1. In an effort to drill down even further, last time I mentioned the fact that this exhortation to think upon things worthy of praise comes at the tail end of a letter where Paul has just expounded much of these things for us.
 - a. So it seems likely to me that Paul is, in not so many words, saying: "If you want peace, don't just pray to the God who hears and cares, ponder the things I've been sharing with you in this letter. Attach the anchor of your soul to these sturdier realities, and you will find you can have peace even in the fiercest of storms."
- B. And this then begs the question: So what sorts of sturdy realities do we find in this letter? Well, I have three I wanted to bring out from this letter for us to consider and see just how setting our minds upon them might influence our peace.
 1. The first, which I gave us last time, was the idea that I am wrapped up safe in God's sovereign grace. And this came from [Phil 1:6](#), in particular, where Paul says that the work which God has begun in us by grace He surely will bring to completion in Christ Jesus.
 - a. There is something true and honorable and excellent to consider indeed! There is a sturdy reality that, if truly pondered and taken into the heart, it would, no doubt, nudge us towards peace.
- C. But we must move from this. Now I pick up with the second and third of these sturdy realities . . .

Sturdy Reality #2: I Am Counted Righteous in Christ

- A. Here I am thinking of [Phil 3](#) in particular where Paul just abominates his own sense of self-righteousness and glories instead in the righteousness of Christ that is now his by faith.
 1. After recounting all that he used to take confidence in—his own ethnicity, his own knowledge, his own religious zeal, his own morality, etc.—he turns and says this: "⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that

which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith . . .” (vv. 7–9).

- B. If you’ve ever tried to justify yourself by any other way than Christ, you know the bait and switch that it is. You try to prove your worth, your value, your righteousness by one standard or another:
1. For Paul it was the Jewish law. But for you it may be something else . . .
 2. It may be that you are trying to find justification by way of beauty—“Once I shrink this waistline, then I’ll be justified.”
 3. It may be by way of intellect—“Once I can carry on a conversation with the Silicon Valley elite and intelligentsia, then I’ll be justified.”
 4. It may be by way of professional success—“Once I grow my company to this magnitude, once we take in this much profit, then I’ll be justified.”
 5. It may be by your parenting expertise—“Once my kids are all in line, respectful, little angels . . . and once all the other mothers see and admire me for it, then I’ll be justified.”
- C. And we can just keep going. And, of course, we think that once we get this sense of justification, then we’ll have peace. And that’s why I call all of this a bait and switch. It promises something to us at the outset but delivers the opposite to us in the end.
1. When you shrink that waistline, you may feel better for a day or two, but then the panic starts to set in. “I can’t ever let up. If I have that brownie, I’m just going to balloon out. If I take a couple days off from my workout routines, I’m going to put those pounds right back on.” You thought it’d give you peace, but it just makes your anxiety worse.
 2. And we could just keep playing that out. Maybe your business was doing well, but then in comes Coronavirus and all you’ve been working for is tottering, and your justification and peace are tottering with it. You see how this works?
 3. For Paul it was: “My goodness, look at me! Aren’t I so righteous?! God must really be impressed.” And then Jesus shows up to him on the road to Damascus and suddenly his whole world is flipped upside down. He realizes how filthy his heart has been in it. All this effort to justify himself by the law has only made him the worst kind of sinner of all—arrogant, impatient, unsympathetic, unloving.
 - a. This is why he says: “All that I thought was to my credit I now ‘count [it] as rubbish’ (v. 8). When I see myself in light of God’s holiness I realize I don’t have a leg to stand on. But Oh how I can fall upon Christ! I’ll let go of all of this. Just give me Christ!”
- D. This is what Paul has come to understand and he wants the Philippians and us to understand it as well.
1. Their justification, their righteousness (and, hence, their peace) is not going to come from themselves. It comes from outside of them, from Christ, and is received by faith.
- E. You see COVID-19 nor anything else can get at that. It’s not going up or down with your diet, etc. We talked about that a little last week with the resurrection. Paul says in [Rom 4:25](#) that Jesus “was

delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” Your justification is tied to Him and He has risen never to die again. It’s incorruptible.

1. Jesus lived the life you should’ve lived, died the death you should’ve died, rose from the dead for your justification, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father where He lives to make intercession for you.
 - a. Satan still can (and will!) point out all manner of reasons that we are not worthy of God’s care and commitment, that we ought to be orphaned and abandoned.
 - b. But in the courtroom of heaven, however loud the devil may get, the blood of Christ speaks a better—and louder!—word still: “It is finished! Forgiven! Washed! Righteous! Justified!”
- F. Here is a stable reality for the Christian. Here is solid ground for the teetering soul. Here is a something true to set our minds upon and ponder. And my sense is that, if we did, we’d be on your way to experiencing the peace of God.

Sturdy Reality #3: I Am a Citizen of Heaven

- A. For this all we must do is lift our eyes to those verses directly above our text for this morning—[Phil 3:17-21](#). Paul here is speaking once more of where a believer must set his mind. And, in this instance, he also makes plain where we ought not to set it. Let’s listen in: “¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” ([Phil 3:17–21](#)).
- B. You see the contrast don’t you?
 1. There are those who have their mind set on “[earthly things](#).” And they should not expect to have peace. They’ve tethered their hearts to transient realities and will, hence, come to find that they have, in the end, only “[pierced themselves with many pangs](#)” ([1 Tim 6:10](#)).
 2. But then there are those who have their minds set on heavenly realities. That is what they are living for. That is what they are waiting for. And, however hard it may get in the here and now, they shall not be disappointed at the last.
- C. I think here of what Peter calls us to in [1 Pet 1:13](#): “[S]et your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”
 1. I’ve always been struck, and, if I’m honest, convicted, by that word “fully”—“set your hope fully”—on the things of heaven. Not “partially.” Not even “mostly.” “Fully.” There’s no room in Peter’s mind for a little bit here and a little bit there. It’s all or it’s nothing.
 - a. It’s as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: “¹⁹ Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and

steal,²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. . . .²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matt 6:19–21, 24).

- D. And of course we can see how setting our minds fully on the things of heaven makes all the difference.
1. So long as we set even a little of our hope elsewhere we sabotage our peace. We doom it to rise and fall with the tide of earthly circumstance.
 2. But if we attach it entirely to Christ and the world to come, well then our peace shall be as sure as His promise—and as the author of Hebrews states: “[I]t is impossible for God to lie” (Heb 6:18).
- E. Oh Christian, you must think of this. In Christ you have been made a citizen of heaven. Your name, as Paul says a few verses later in Phil 4:3, has been written by God “in the book of life.”
1. Listen to me. You may be a stranger to everyone else on the earth. You may be treated as insignificant and unimportant, a nobody, by everyone under the sun. But God knows your name. And He’s written it, with the blood of Christ as His ink, in the roll sheet of heaven.
 - a. Brother, sister, you have been secured unto, you are being prepared for, you are invariably heading towards, a world of love, and glory, and peace. That’s your inheritance. That’s your destination. That’s your country. That’s your home.
- F. And Paul is saying in back in our text, if we would only set our minds upon and ponder lovely realities like this one, we’d be well on our way to experience something of that peace even here and now.

(3) Step #3: Practice (esp. v. 9)

Walking Out Upon This

- A. Now we move to that third and final step along this path, and it’s what Paul identifies for us particularly there in v. 9: “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” Practice.
- B. Now, if I’m honest with you, this is where things get especially hard for me.
1. I’m decent at praying, I’m pretty good at pondering and studying God’s word and things, but this one gets me. Practice. Don’t just pray about it. Don’t just think about it. Act on it. Walk out upon it. All of these things ought to actually change the way we live.
 - a. And if we’re not ready to live out the implications of it all, we will fall short of the full-bodied peace that God wants us to experience and know. We will miscarry on it as it were. We won’t take it to full term and experience it in its richest form.

- C. Now, specifically here, Paul says if we want peace, we must practice what we have seen in him. Well, what exactly is that?
1. Again, I take my cues from the broader context of this letter as a whole. In this letter to the Philippians, what has Paul been telling us about his life that we ought to be emulating in our own now?
- D. Well, there is probably much we could say here, but I do think that one thing in particular seems to come out clearest in this letter: namely, his Christ-exalting, self-sacrificing, others-centered love. That is what we see—on every page we see it.
1. So in [Phil 1:8](#) he writes: “God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” “I love you. My heart is set upon you.”
 2. And in [Phil 1:23b-25](#) he says: “^{23b} My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith . . .” “I’m ready to go be with the Lord. But so long as He keeps me here on this earth, I know I’m here not for me, but for you.”
 3. So in [Phil 2:17](#) he writes: “Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.” “I will gladly spend my life in your service!”

Anxious for You!

- A. Here’s what you need to understand. Paul, as he’s writing this letter, is imprisoned, most likely in Rome, for the sake of the gospel, because of opposition and persecution.
1. And yet he’s not anxious about himself—he’s concerned with, burdened for, even anxious about, them.
- B. And that’s the sort of irony I wanted to bring out here. The way to truly experiencing the peace of God, Paul is saying, is to stop being anxious for yourself and start being anxious in love for others.
1. So Paul in our text says “[D]o not be anxious about anything . . . (v. 6) but ironically, he used the same Greek word there (*merimnao*) earlier in [Phil 2:20](#) in a positive light, to commend Timothy: “For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned [Gk. *merimnao* = anxious] for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel” (vv. 20-22). “Everyone else get all anxious about their own interests. He’s going to be anxious for yours.”
 2. And Paul uses that same Greek word yet again in [1 Cor 12:25](#) when he’s talking about the healthy functioning of the body of Christ: “²⁵ [T]he members [should] have the same care [Gk. *merimnao* = anxiety] for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (vv. 25-26).

- C. So here's what I want you to catch: Paul is saying: "If you want peace, practice what you see in me. And what you see in me is, ironically, not an anxiety for myself, but an anxiety for the needs and wellbeing of others. If you want peace, get anxious . . . for the right things!"
- D. And I don't think it's very hard to see how all of this fits together—how our praying and our pondering would lead to this sort of lifestyle in practice.
1. If we are praying and giving God our anxieties, instead of just stewing on them and letting them make a mess of our hearts and minds;
 2. if we are putting our mind on the truths of God and pondering all of His stable and sturdy promises to us;
 3. well, quite naturally we would no longer feel the great need to worry so much about ourselves. God has hears us. He has us. We are wrapped up safe in sovereign grace. We are counted righteous incorruptible in Christ. We are citizens of heaven.
 - a. Why should we be so worked up for ourselves any longer?! How could we not be spending our days in love now for others?! I have been cut loose from concern for me and I'm finally free to concern myself with you.
- E. That's the final step in this pathway to peace. That's the full range of motion God is trying to work out in our lives.
1. Do this and the God of peace will be with you, Paul says. And it makes sense because it's the very thing the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, did while He was here—He spent His life, poured out His blood in love, not for Himself, but others—for you and for me!

Practicing in a Pandemic

- A. Now, I know this is hard. I know especially now in the midst of the Coronavirus chaos, we are tempted, perhaps more than ever, to cave in with concern for ourselves.
1. But Paul is saying if we want peace, pray about the stuff that's burdening us, ponder afresh the promises of God, and go out armed by faith in those promises and spend your life for others.
 - a. Order some of the Neighborhood Care Cards from Jill and distribute them around your block.
 - b. Get on the Nextdoor app and reach out to see if there are people in need of help.
 - c. Even in this uncertain time, instead of hiding your cash under the mattress in your bed, release your grip and use it to bless others.
 - d. In this time of social isolation, send someone an email, a text, make a call, let them know you love them. Ask how you can be praying for them.
- B. It is easier I think to pray and to ponder. It's hard to walk out the implications of all this, to practice what we see in Paul and, before him, in Jesus.
1. But let's do it! Like Peter stepping out of the boat, let's do it! And let's watch how this peace that surpasses all understanding comes to us as we do!