

Frantic or Faith Filled? Philippians 4:4-9 bible-sermons.org December 30, 2012

I'm not sure why I'm preparing this sermon because I'm doing so on the 21st of December 2012, the last day of the Mayan calendar. According to some, none of us are supposed to be here on the 30th when I plan to deliver the message. I think we went through this not too long ago with the radio preacher, Harold Camping, who was sure Jesus would return in May of 2011. And of course the world was going into an electronic meltdown back on Y2K. But here we are.

2012 was quite a year. The Arab Spring turned into an Arab nightmare. Syria has murdered tens of thousands of its own citizens and recently gave Iran Russian made missile systems. Iran is closer than was thought to creating a nuclear bomb. Gaza continues to lob thousands of missiles into Israel as the world condemns Israel's self-defense. Egypt has been taken over by the Muslim Brotherhood. Hurricane Sandy devastated the Northeast causing billions of dollars in damage. Several states legalized marijuana, a carcinogen that is much deadlier than tobacco. Our national debt totals over \$136,000 per household or in other terms \$2000 for every human on the planet. If you think your dollar is worth anything, think again. No doubt we will go over the fiscal cliff or they'll pass something inconsequential as our government is locked in a battle of two differing ideologies. That will probably bring about more unemployment and home foreclosures. And then there is North Korea, a nation starving its citizenry. They just launched a satellite into orbit which means they can nuke the USA or what is more probable, sell the technology to a fanatical state. I can't remember this much tension in the world since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Then there are the personal crises in families: illness, financial difficulties, conflicts, frustrations. Life can be overwhelming. If we just dwelt on all these discouraging issues, I'm sure we could all work ourselves into a state of depression. Yet, the Scriptures tell us to rejoice in the Lord always. Is that a Pollyanna attitude? Should we just forget about it all and think happy thoughts regardless?

I want to close out the year and look forward to the New Year by pointing us back to our study in Philippians chapter 4. *⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness 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.
Philippians 4:4-9 (ESV)

Considering Paul's world might give us some perspective. He was in a Roman prison, chained to a guard when he dictated this letter. He very well could have been fed to the lions at any time. He had been and beaten and previously imprisoned in the city to which this letter was addressed. The Roman Caesar at the time was the mad tyrant Nero. Fellow believers were being persecuted and martyred. But even in these conditions, which we would consider unbearable, he told us to rejoice in the Lord always. In Hebrew style, he made his plea emphatic by adding, "again I say, rejoice!"

A few weeks ago I shared with you how my wife and I had to make the choice to dwell on the positive. Discouragement was overwhelming us. It was not easy, but we had to make the choice not to allow ourselves to wallow in misery. We read uplifting books. We focused on the positive side of things. We listened to praise music. We chose to trust God and follow His instruction through the Apostle, rejoice always.

James said we should count it all joy when we face trials of various kinds because it helps us develop perseverance. (James 1:2-3) We have to remember that we are strangers here, that this world is not our home. We have to keep in mind that we are just passing through. (2Peter 2:11) Every day actually is one day closer to the Lord's return, whether for us individually or as the body of believers. *The Lord is at hand.* Life is short! Paul said these light (and remember what he was calling light) and momentary afflictions turn into something glorious for eternity. (2Corinthians 4:17) We are like travelers on our way home for Christmas. The traffic may get bad. We may even have a wreck and storms on the trip, but we are on our way home! No wonder James said we should rejoice!

When I was much younger, I had a vivid dream of being in a room. When you have a God given dream, you can remember it clearly years later. There was a hallway before me that turned to the right. I couldn't see the length of it, just the beginning. There were people on each side of the hall with bats and chains and things to inflict pain if anyone dared to try to go through the hall. I knew Jesus was waiting at the end of the hallway, so I made a run for it. I woke up before I got more than a few steps down that hallway. That is where my life was at that point, just a few steps down that gauntlet. (Acts 14:22)

Life in this world can be very hard. We have it much easier than most of the world, but still personal conflicts, misunderstandings, illness and difficulties can weigh any of us down. The hallway has an end. It is limited in length. And God promises He will never give you more than you can bear. (1Corinthians 10:12) God will be your strength if you look to Him. (Psalm 27:1) That is another reason to rejoice. We have a resource that is all-sufficient to see us through whatever we face. To the offspring of Abraham, whose

Commented [notes1]: James 1:2-3 (ESV)

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,
³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Commented [notes2]: 1 Peter 2:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Commented [notes3]: 2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

Commented [notes4]: Acts 14:22 (ESV)

²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Commented [notes5]: 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Commented [notes6]: Psalm 27:1 (ESV)

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

you are by faith (Galatians 3:29), God says, ¹⁰ *fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* Isaiah 41:10 (ESV)

In the midst of the Apostle Paul's crisis, the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness." (2Corinthians 12:9) When we are the most dependent on God, He will be the most powerful in us.

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.* Are you anxious about the coming year, about your finances, our nation, and the international conditions? Paul tells us from his prison cell, don't do it! Instead give it to God in prayer. He doesn't say God will do what you want and make everything wonderful. The Bible does not predict the world will gradually become converted and turn into the Kingdom of God. (Luke 18:8) It predicts things will worsen until the return of Christ. (2Thessalonians 2:3) But you don't have to fret about that. Give it to God knowing He knows what is best. He draws those who will come to Him by faith. He is sovereign over it all.

Lay your burdens at His feet. Thank Him for who He is. Ask Him for what you need, and trust Him to supply it. (Philippians 4:19) If you will do that, the peace of God that goes beyond what we can understand, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. That is the promise. When we find ourselves fretting and anxious, we need to run to this verse and do what it says. Sometimes it helps to write out your prayer. Tell Him your concerns. Ask for His will to be done. Put it in one of those bowls the elders have before the throne and watch it go up as incense before the Lord. (Revelation 5:8) Then accept the peace that passes understanding. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Sometimes we refuse to accept the peace He offers. You probably know what I mean. We take the burden to the Lord and lay it down; then, we pick it back up as soon as we finish praying. We roll it over in our mind as if *we* had to resolve it. It is past our understanding! We will never figure out all that God is doing and how He is using the things we don't understand. Let it go. Cast your anxieties on the Lord, but don't reel them back in! (1Peter 5:7)

The peace of God that we can receive by faith is accepting that our concerns are in God's hands and that God will have His way in the end. **God is at perfect peace. He already knows how it all turns out.** Imagine how at peace God is! The Bible says He laughs when the heathen rage against Him. (Psalm 2:4) His peace is unshakable, and it is the peace He wants to share with us if we will give Him our concerns in prayer along with our requests and thanksgiving. We can thank Him that our salvation in Christ gives us access to the throne of God. We can thank Him that He is who He is, merciful, loving,

Commented [notes7]: Galatians 3:29 (ESV)

²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Commented [notes8]: 2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Commented [notes9]: Luke 18:8 (ESV)

⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Commented [notes10]: 2 Thessalonians 2:3 (ESV)

³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

Commented [notes11]: Philippians 4:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Commented [notes12]: Revelation 5:8 (ESV)

⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Commented [notes13]: Proverbs 3:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Commented [notes14]: 1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)

⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Commented [notes15]: Psalm 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

gracious, kind, benevolent and yet righteous and holy. We can thank Him that He will help us through whatever we have to face. We can thank Him that He offers His peace to us. (John 14:27)

As I was reviewing this yesterday, I had a series of very frustrating circumstances that continued all day. I really lost the peace of the Lord in the midst of it. I was wondering where I failed. It was right here at the "with thanksgiving". You see, I was complaining as I shared my burdens with the Lord, not thanking Him for the trials that drove this sermon home to my own heart.

The peace of God guards our hearts and minds. Our hearts include the emotions that come with our concerns. We feel pain of the families in Newtown and we can despair or we can take it to the Lord in prayer and know that He can do more than we can imagine. (Ephesians 3:20) We worry about finances and caring for our loved ones. We have the same choice. Take it to God in prayer and ask Him for direction and provision, or we can fret and fear. God longs to guard our hearts with His very own peace if we will trust Him. You won't find much peace in trusting yourself because you know from experience how limited you are.

God's peace also guards our minds. We have to discipline our thought life. (2Corinthians 10:5) We wake up in the middle of the night and start wondering what if... Our thoughts can spiral into a dark place if we don't let the peace of God guard our minds in Christ. When we recognize that cycle beginning, we must immediately move to the next verse. 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.* We have to change the direction of our thoughts. God's Spirit enables us to do this. You may have to do it a hundred times a day, but you can with God's help.

When our hearts and minds are in Christ, we can dwell on what is true. Jesus said He is the truth. (John 14:6) Most of what we worry about is not truth but rather fear of something that may or may not happen. We imagine outcomes that are completely figments of our imagination. Instead, we should dwell on what you know is true right now. For the Christian that is more than just the circumstance but also includes the nature and attributes of God. The conditions of this fallen world don't change who He is. They just declare that He was right about the consequences of sin in the world. He was right about that and He is right about our future destiny.

Think about the honorable actions around you and how you can be honorable in your response to your situations and honor the Lord. Think about what is just. Eventually justice will prevail in every case, even if it is at the Judgment Throne of God. Think about what is pure. Our minds can deceive us into thinking there is pleasure in impurity while ignoring the consequences. Keep your thought life pure.

Commented [notes16]: John 14:27 (ESV)

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 hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Commented [notes17]: Ephesians 3:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,

Commented [notes18]: 2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)

⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Commented [notes19]: John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

There is so much that is ugly; dwell on the lovely. Dwell on what is commendable. Excellent, praiseworthy deeds should fill our minds. Instead of dwelling on the world's governments that are in turmoil, dwell on the commendable work of Voice of the Martyrs and Spirit of Martyrdom and Samaritan's Purse and Mercy Ships and India Evangelical Mission and a host of others, including how God has worked through your life. Write an encouraging letter to a missionary whose testimony has moved you. Instead of worrying about Iran's nukes, pray for Israel, for Christians in Iran, for evangelists there, for the salvation of prisoners locked up with evangelists and for their guards as well. (Matthew 16:18) It is hard to be depressed when you discipline your mind to think this way.

As you commit your anxieties and burdens to the Lord, He will often give you some form of action to take. That leads us to our final verse. 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.*

Paul demonstrated spiritual disciplines and Spirit led actions. We will begin a new series on spiritual disciplines next week. We'll look at how the people of God throughout church history have disciplined their thoughts and actions to be available to the Holy Spirit for service. We learn from the Word, but we also learn from the godly lives of those who have gone before us. When we put these disciplines into practice, the God of peace will be with us. If the God of peace is with us, we won't be fretting and fearful of what is to come. Instead we will be God's servants, empowered by the Spirit to be His voice, an example to a world that is longing for peace. We will be demonstrating that there is a better way, a way that rises above circumstances, the more than a conqueror life. (Romans 8:37)

What is coming in 2013 is not nearly as important as *who* you and I are in the midst of whatever comes. The seekers of the world are looking for someone who is living the message. They are looking for the incarnational life we talked about last week. (2Corinthians 4:10) Living this way is not only in our best interest and glorifies God, but it demonstrates the truth of the message of Jesus. Through our life in Christ and our fellowship in the Holy Spirit, we can face whatever comes in 2013, joyful in Jesus, and an example of His peace in a chaotic world of change. He is the only thing that will forever remain the same. (Hebrews 13:8) The psalmist wrote, ⁸ *I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.* Psalm 16:8 (ESV) Let us follow his example!

Questions

- 1 Do a quick review of 2013.
- 2 What were Paul's circumstances when he wrote to the Philippians?
- 3 Why should we be joyful in trials?

Commented [notes20]: Matthew 16:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Commented [notes21]: Romans 8:37 (ESV)

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Commented [notes22]: 2 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Commented [notes23]: Hebrews 13:8 (ESV)

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

- 4 What did Paul's dream symbolize?
- 5 Where do we find strength?
- 6 What state of mind does Paul forbid?
- 7 What should we do instead?
- 8 What is the promise? Whose peace?
- 9 How can we deal with our thoughts?
- 10 What is gained by following Paul's instruction?