

Message #22

Philippians 4:4-7

We used to have a very loving part-Chinese dog, a Chow, that we named “Fluffy.” This dog originally comes from northern China and ironically the Chinese name for the dog is “Song Shi Quan,” meaning “Fluffy Lion Dog. Now Fluffy loved blizzards and frigid temperatures. It was not uncommon for us to look outside and see Fluffy out in a blizzard, lying down enjoying life. All other people and animals were hunkered down inside and then you would look outside and see Fluffy just enjoying life in the midst of a storm.

Dr. Archibald Hart, who has written a book on the subject of depression, said there are over 9 million people in the United States that cannot cope with the storms of life. They lose sleep, weight, work and relationships and 15% of them will try to kill themselves. These people do their best to put on a happy face when they are out in public, but behind the scenes is a broken, hurting, lonely, non-coping individual and many of these people are Christians.

Yet, on the other hand, you look at some Christians they seem to cope with anything and everything. No matter what the storm they seem to cope with life and even enjoy it. How does that work? Furthermore, when you come to these verses in Philippians we see that **God does expect His people to enjoy their lives even in stormy times.**

When the Apostle Paul wrote these verses, he was in jail and he did not know for sure whether or not he would get out. In fact, he thought he could be executed. Now that is a major storm of life. Yet we do not find him depressed, we find him upbeat, happy, joyful and at peace.

He knew that storms rage at times against God’s church and he knew there would be times when an icy, frigid chill could develop between believers. He knew about personality problems in the church. He knew about doctrinal attacks. He knew about personal attacks and hardships and suffering and sacrifice. Yet even with these kinds of things happening, Paul wanted N.T. believers not only to calmly endure life, but enjoy life.

What he writes in these verses is powerful and needed. What he says is this:

GOD’S SUPERNATURAL PEACE WILL BE GIVEN TO A BELIEVER WHO MAINTAINS A JOYFUL ATTITUDE, A POSITIVE TESTIMONY AND A PERSISTENT PRAYER LIFE, REGARDLESS OF THE STORMY CIRCUMSTANCES.

Having a supernatural peace in life that is able to cope with anything is from God and God is the One who can grant that peace and give it. In order for Him to do that, there are three prerequisites that must be met. If any believer is willing to meet these prerequisites, God will grant His supernatural peace.

PREREQUISITE #1 – The prerequisite of a proper internal attitude of joy. **4:4**

If a believer is to experience the supernatural peace of God, he/she must have a joyful attitude.

The believer must “rejoice in the Lord.” Two times in this verse Paul says to “rejoice.” That word means be of good cheer, be glad and have joy. Now this particular verb was used when greeting people, so it is extremely important for us to be cheerful and joyous in life when we are in contact with others (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 477-478). When people meet us they should not say here is negative gloom and doom.

Now Paul is very clear to point out where we find this kind of joy. It is not found in circumstances, success, promotion, possessions, pleasure, position or prosperity. **Joy is found in a Person. The one Person who can give one joy is Jesus Christ.**

This is what people need to know. No matter how low you are, no matter how depressed you are, no matter what your circumstances or emotional turmoil, the one Person who can give you joy is Jesus Christ. Not a prescription, not a medication, but a Person, Jesus Christ.

Now carefully observe that Paul says, “rejoice in the Lord **always**.” This is an adverb of time, which literally means at all times. So what Paul is saying is at all times, not just good times or happy times, a key to having God’s supernatural peace is to maintain an attitude of joy in Jesus Christ.

Now the man writing this prerequisite is sitting in jail, not knowing whether he would live or die. When he first went to Philippi, he was beaten and thrown in jail and yet he had so much joy that he was singing praises to God (Acts 16:25). Paul was a man who continually found his joy in the Lord and he did have a supernatural peace.

Back when we were in school, we were surrounded by couples with children who literally seemed to have nothing. Some had given up good jobs to go to school and from a financial standpoint circumstances did not appear good. Many moved to go to school by faith. They moved to Grand Rapids and found part-time jobs and weren’t sure how they would pay for all tuition, rent, food and books. When you would see these families, they were as happy as they could be. They were on the campus always upbeat, always rejoicing in the Lord. They had a peace about them, they had a joy about them and that was what Paul was after.

The key to having this peace is not mumbling or grumbling, but rejoicing in the Lord. This is not something you can fake. When we truly have joy in the Lord, we will have the peace of God.

Spurgeon used to tell preachers, you need to demonstrate your message by your facial expressions. He said when you speak of the Lord or speak of heaven let your face light up. He said when you speak of hell use your own ordinary face. That will do quite nicely.

PREREQUISITE #2 – The prerequisite of a positive, external testimony before others. **4:5**

If we are to experience the peace of God, we must demonstrate a proper, positive external testimony before others.

That adjective “gentle” is one that means to do what is seemly, fitting, equitable and fair in regard to all men. This attitude is demonstrated in view of the reality that “the Lord is near.” This may mean the Lord is near to us personally or He is near to us eschatologically. In other words, we are to live our lives knowing the Lord is near to us at all times and may soon come and get us.

We are to live life in a way that reflects this at all times to all men. We are to demonstrate that the Lord is near to us and dear to us at all times. We are to do this to the character and quality of all types of people—both believers and unbelievers. We are to demonstrate that to family and friends and those who aren’t our friends. We are to demonstrate that the Lord is near to us when we are with religious people and heathen sinners. We are to display it when we do business.

In any context of life, God wants us portraying an equitable picture of Christlikeness and if we do that we will experience the peace of God. We are to present a fair and good and accurate portrait of the Lord in any context of life.

Ivor Powell, an old Welsh minister, wrote a book called Bible Windows. In that book he tells the true story of a rich man who died and left no heirs. His household goods were being auctioned off and an old, elderly woman, dressed in shabby clothes came to the auction and was the only woman to bid on a picture of the dead man’s son. The large crowd wanted everything else but no one cared for the picture of his son. When the woman got the picture, she was asked why she wanted it and she said she had been the boy’s nurse before he died and had loved him dearly. All she wanted was the picture of him. When she got home, she noticed that there was a bulge in the back of the picture and she discovered an envelope and in the envelope was a will which said, “I leave all my property and money to the one who loves my son.”

God is promising He will give His supernatural peace and power and prizes to those who love His Son and does their best to let His Son be seen in their lives.

PREREQUISITE #3 – The prerequisite of proper prayer made to God at all times. **4:6**

There is much in the Christian warfare that can raise the anxiety level. Circumstances, Satanic opposition, the pressures of this world and our old natures war against a godly tranquility.

The word “anxious” is one that means to have such a concern about something that it causes anxiety. There is no question that there are things that can produce anxiety.

Anxiety is a vague feeling that overwhelms a person. One writer said anxiety can cause many symptoms: rapid heartbeat, difficult breathing, sweating, dry mouth, tightness of chest, sweaty palms, dry mouth, dizziness, weakness, nausea, diarrhea, cramps, insomnia, fatigue, headache and loss of appetite. Anxiety results in an inability to accomplish normal tasks.

Anxiety is a threat to Christians and it can destroy one's peace and joy. When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He actually taught on this very theme. He did not want His people anxious about things (Matt. 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34).

Now Paul addresses that theme here and what he says is **“Be anxious for nothing but instead pray about everything.” Don't be anxious about anything, instead pray about everything.** A critical key to resolving anxiety conflict is prayer. That word “everything” means just that. Pray about everything.

What we may immediately observe is that Paul uses four different words to stress prayer:

- 1) Prayer—the word emphasizes move toward God in prayer (Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 382).
- 2) Supplication—this word stresses prayer made with a sense of urgency and need (*Ibid.*, p. 99).
- 3) Thanksgiving—prayer made in an attitude of gratitude and thankfulness (*Ibid.*, pp. 190-191).
- 4) Requests—prayer that makes a specific request or petition (*Ibid.*, p. 14).

Now collectively these words mean to specifically go to God and pray when one finds himself in anxious situations or moments. Instead of staying in the anxiety, one goes to the Lord and specifically talks to God about the matter. What Paul is saying is that believers need to learn to go to God and honestly communicate with Him.

This is so foreign to our world that says talk to a counselor or a psychiatrist. Many of the emotional anxieties in people's lives could be resolved if people would simply talk to God.

Now Paul says in **verse 7** if we are willing to do these things, then the result will be that our hearts and our minds will be guarded by a peace of God that surpasses all human comprehension.

There is a peace that men can understand. There is a type of peace and tranquility that men can grasp. For example, when a man gets a promotion or seems to succeed or is given a nice income or has a nice home or has investments that pay off, there is a pride and peace that is understandable.

What Paul is speaking of here is a peace that comes when humans cannot understand it.

There is a supernatural peace that can exist when you take the promotion, the success, the income and the home away. When you see a person who is at peace when that happens, you are seeing a peace in which God, Himself, is guarding the heart and mind.

It was Isaiah who said, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee” (Is. 26:3).

When you see a godly parent at the funeral of his own child say, “God has His reasons.”
When you see a believer with cancer say, “God is in control and my trust is in Him.”
When you see a believer who just lost his job say, “God will take care of me.”
When you see those who suffered a great loss say, “God is still My God and His ways are perfect.

You are seeing a peace that is far superior to anything human.

That person got that peace not from a bottle of whiskey or from prescription pills, but from being on their knees. Instead of breaking down, they kneel down.

You cannot buy that kind of peace with money or fame or success. Marilyn Monroe could not sleep at night without pills. Jackie Gleason once said all I really want is “a good night’s sleep.” Marlin Brando said, “my rise in fame and fortune has just increased the bank accounts of my psychiatrists.”

You cannot buy the peace of God with money or fame or success or accomplishments. It comes by this formula.

Why not try it and see if it works. Before you spend your next \$100 at a counselor, or before you buy your next prescription of anti-depressants, why not see if what Paul says here really works.

Why don’t you get down on your knees and spend a few minutes with God in prayer.

If you truly apply this, you will be as happy and content as a dog in a storm.