

We are back in our Philippians series this week, continuing in chapter four. Now, a couple of weeks ago, we recapped the earlier chapters by looking at all the occasions that Paul mentions the name of Jesus Christ in this letter—because it emphasized again how, for Paul, *everything is about Jesus*.

Well, *because* Christ is the foundation for his letter, there's another supporting theme or subtheme imbedded into these verses—and Paul can't help but be filled with it when His whole life is governed and dictated by the Lordship of Christ. Joy.

So I want to recap this week by showing you all the times that Paul speaks about joy so far in the letter. Because it's definitely part of what makes this letter so endearing.

*"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray **with joy**...." (1:3-4)*

*"But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this **I rejoice**." (1:18) – to be filled with joy*

*"Yes, and **I will continue to rejoice**, for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance." (1:18-19)*

*"Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for **your progress and joy** in the faith...." (1:25)*

*"Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit... then **make my joy complete** by being like-minded...." (2:1-2)*

*"...even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad **and rejoice with** all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me." (2:17-18)*

*"So then, welcome him in the Lord **with great joy**, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ." (2:29-30)*

*"Further, my brothers and sisters, **rejoice** in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you." (3:1)*

Had you noticed that Paul speaks about joy so often? It's a theme—as we'll see—that continues to be present in the rest of chapter four. And I wanted to highlight this because I want every one of you to be able to walk out of this place at the end of the series *knowing* what this letter is about.

All is Christ. Christ is the reason for Paul's joy. And this again is the foundation for the passage that we're going to read for this morning. **Read Philippians 4:4-9.**

Many of you might be familiar with the well-known musician and worship leader, Brian Doerksen, who passed away this last week from cancer. He had an incredibly influential career in writing songs and offering music to the Church over the last few decades—and a number of his songs we sing or have sung here in our own church.

And I was reminded of how one of his songs—a song that we sang earlier—quotes directly from this letter to the Philippians. And if you’ve been with us for the last number of weeks, you’ll very likely recognize these words.

“One day every tongue will confess you are God; one day every knee will bow (Phil. 2). Still the greatest treasure remains for those who gladly choose you now.”

It’s a beautiful part of the song, but admittedly there’s one word in there that I’ve never really taken note of until this past week—because it’s the same word that Paul uses multiple times over in this letter.

“Still the greatest treasure remains for those who *gladly* choose you now.” The word that Paul uses for ‘rejoice’ here in Philippians also means to be glad. To be glad is to rejoice. To gladly choose Christ is to joyfully choose Him.

And—based on what has been said about him—that’s exactly what Brian did, right until the very end. Family members spoke about how he never stopped encouraging and being incredibly grateful. “A beacon of light,” they said, even in his final moments.

He gladly chose Christ—He joyfully chose Christ—right up until the very end, and with rejoicing looked forward to the day when every knee would bow and every tongue would confess that Jesus is God.

And it’s for this same intention that Paul’s urging the Philippians in verse 4 to “*Rejoice in the Lord always.*” He’ll say it again—and over and over again if he has to—“*Rejoice!*” Because there’s something deeply essential to the life of the Christian about living in joy. Because everything we do flows out of that place—that joyful contentment—that we have with Christ.

And just to be clear from the start here, joyfulness in Christ does not negate or set aside the real and necessary human experience of pain. *But* it is what is naturally produced in the Spirit specifically when we can take our *anxieties*, when we can locate them within ourselves and then relocate them into the presence of Christ.

Look at what Paul says in verses 5-6 after he calls them to rejoice: “*Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.*”

Again for the sake of clarity, Paul isn't speaking here about chronic anxiety, or situational anxiety, or the kinds of anxiety that require medical attention and assistance—which we know is more complex.

The word that Paul uses here is actually the same word that Jesus uses in Matthew 6:25 when he says to his disciples, “Do not **worry** about your life, what you will eat or drink....” And then later in verse 34: “Therefore do not **worry** about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.”

Paul's speaking about an anxious worrying, which I know every single one of us does.

And so on a quick read, we might assume—based on this verse—that the solution to all of our worrying is to just give it all to God. And to be fair, it is certainly God's desire that we would take everything before Him in prayer. But Paul's not trying to present God here as a kind of anxiety disposal service.

In the underground parking of our condo complex, we have four different blue bins for recycling—plastic bags, Styrofoam, paper, and mixed containers. And sometimes I think we treat prayer with God like how we sort our recycling.

“Okay God, here's all my prayers for other people, here's the things I feel bad about, here's my worries about the future, and then here's all the requests that I want you to do something about.”

To simply dump our worries into God's lap isn't what Paul's talking about. Remember, the foundation for this whole section is to rejoice. All of these verses hang together.

And so the assumption, then, is that out of this place of rejoicing in Christ, of choosing Christ joyfully and gladly, we not only display the gentleness of Christ—the gentleness that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit—but we also recognize that the Lord's presence is with us *and* we offer our worries to Him from that place.

So often people quote verse 6 (the ‘do not be anxious’ bit) without seeing that verse 4 sets the foundation for it. These verses aren't meant to be plucked apart like a rotisserie chicken.

Paul would never have said to us, “Don't be anxious about anything” without first giving us the means by which we can do that. He sets the foundation for prayer by first-and-foremost telling us to *rejoice*. Before you even come before God in prayer and start sorting through your stuff, *rejoice*. Recognize that the Lord isn't far from you—He's near. He is present. His gentleness is *with* you.

And *guaranteed*, this changes the way that we hold our anxiety—or our worries—before God in prayer.

Seeing some of the news coverage over this last week about the forest fires—not only locally but also in France and Spain—reminded me of a story that my mother-in-law once shared with me. She and her husband, Ezequiel—Danny’s dad—had moved from Angola to North Carolina with their two daughters to seek medical treatment for his brain cancer diagnosis.

And one night, when they happened to be staying with the grandparents, they heard news that their house in Greensboro had caught on fire. And by the time they returned, the whole house had burned down (electrical fire). They had lost everything.

But they committed it to prayer, knowing that Christ was near to them in that tragedy—because of course, had they been at home, they likely would have been seriously injured or killed. And within a matter of days, everything that they had lost was replaced, and then some, because of the generosity of people in their community who became the hands and feet of Christ to provide for their needs.

And I know we don’t do this intentionally, but I think we often subconsciously believe that God only shows up for those who *really* need Him. And these kinds of stories only happen for those who *desperately* need God to show up.

But what this says to me is that we don’t ask Him to show up unless *we* need Him to. In other words, we’re thinking about His ‘nearness’ from our vantage point, not His. If we think we’re fine or capable to handle things on our own, we leave Him out.

And I wonder how much *excess* worry we have in our lives because that’s how we think.

For Paul, when we release our worries, when we live in such a way that we are regularly in prayer offering our worries to God out of place of rejoicing in His nearness to us, *then* verse 7, “*the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”

In this state, your hearts and minds will be guarded. So again, this isn’t a simple deposit one thing and get out another. *Peace is not separate from God’s presence.* We have to understand this. We don’t have a trade agreement with God so that when we give Him our worry, He gives us peace. It’s not transactional. Many of our other arrangements and relationships are transactional, but not here.

The nearness of Christ *is* our peace. When we bring our worries before Him, we come face to face with the presence of peace. It’s not something that He gives to us. He *is* it.

Remember, this whole letter has focused us in on being in Christ, taking on the humility of Christ, and having the same mind as Christ. *That still applies in this passage.* To rejoice in Christ is to be in Christ. To let our gentleness be evident is to take on the humility of Christ. To recognize that the Lord is near is to have the same mind as Christ.

So why, why would we worry, if the peace of God is near to us in Christ? When this isn't just a peace that temporarily calms us, but a peace that *passes understanding*, that *transcends* all understanding? And when we know from Scripture that anything that is so wonderful that it is beyond understanding is of God?

Full transparency: I say this all as someone who is a worrier. It's something I know that I inherited from my dad's side of the family—particularly from my grandmother, who apparently was an incessant worrier. But I also know that my grandmother was an incessant prayer-er and that everything was constantly being placed into the hands of God—including her children and grandchildren. And there is *so much need* today for prophetic worriers who point all of us trapped in our anxieties to the true cornerstone of peace.

Because here's the thing. The extent to which our worries and anxieties carry us *also* goes beyond our understanding. We barely even notice how much of our mental and emotional energy is sucked from us by worry.

And so what great need there is, then, for Christians who live in joy, who are gentle in every situation, who recognize the Lord's transforming presence around us and lay everything down at His feet in worship.

Because if *every* knee will one day bow before Him in worship, then of course every concern, every fear, every worry, every anxiety can also be laid at His feet.

It's why Paul goes on to encourage the Philippians to focus their minds on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, praiseworthy. An anxious mind is prone to wander. Worries can carry us to places that lead to discouragement, discontentment, ungrounded fears, and even bodily stress—which we see happening more and more often.

To live under a garment of anxiety has never been God's desired intention for us. And so to rejoice in Christ's nearness is actually—I think—one of the ways that we live into Romans 12:2 and not conform to the patterns of this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. So that we don't submit again to a yoke of slavery, as Paul says in Galatians 5:1.

Again, this isn't about simply being released us from our anxiety, but about transforming the way that we engage with our worries and anxieties in Christ.

Lately my kids have been enjoying listening to some of the songs from the Disney movie, Lion King, including a song called "Hakuna Matata," which means 'no worries.' And in one of the YouTube versions, they play the scene leading up to the song. So Simba's just lost his dad, he's been told by his evil uncle that it's all his fault, and now he's run away in fear, and is told by Timon and Pumba that he can simply put his past behind him.

“Look kid,” says Timon to Simba, “Bad things happen, and you can’t do anything about it, right?” “Right,” says Simba. “Wrong!” says Timon. “When the world turns its back on you, you turn your back on the world.” And then they proceed to sing the song about not worrying.

And I’m listening to this, thinking, ‘This is the worst therapy session ever.’ But that’s of course part of the humour of it. And everyone watching it knows that it’s not the healthiest approach to dealing with trauma and pain. But the song is still highlighting something really significant.

Because wouldn’t we all just love to live that way? To push worry and fear aside, as if they don’t exist? Wouldn’t we love to just not deal with it? To just throw it all in a box and go along our merrily way?

Paul knows nothing of that approach. His whole life—as we’ve seen throughout this letter—is again about locating our worry and then relocating that worry in Christ. To have a transparency before Christ and allow the fullness of ourselves to be *in* Christ.

In other words, when we are in Christ, there are no avoidance maneuvers. There’s no picking and choosing, or burying our anxiety and pretending it’s all okay. Nor is there room (on the opposite extreme) to worry incessantly about the things that we can’t control.

We can waste so much of our mental energy thinking about ‘such things’—rather than the things that Paul calls us to think about. We have all the freedom in the world to spend all our days stressing over all the things that have already happened or the future circumstances that haven’t happened yet. We can choose to do that.

Or we can know that we have the freedom to bring our big blue bin of mess to Jesus, with all the uncertainties, and see His gentle face swallowing us up in love.

Why? Because we came to *Him* with it.

And what peace that brings. It’s not just any peace, but one that exudes from the presence of Christ. A life lived in Him knows of no other peace.

And what is there then to do but rejoice?