**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 10-29-2023** **The Place for Prayer**

Friends, Saturdays, as you may guess, are often interesting days for pastors. In some ways they serve as preparation days. This doesn’t mean that this is all that I do on Saturday, but it is usually at least a small part of my day. Personally, I love this time every Saturday and find it very meaningful in prayerfully reviewing and preparing for Sunday worship. When I feel like I have done this and have God’s blessing, His amen on things, it enables me to just relax and just be excited for worship the next day. There is a great sense of peace that I feel when I know that I have God’s blessing on the service and on the message and it is in His hands now.

But as you might guess, there have some weeks from time to time over the years when that time of preparation and review does not quite come about. In fact, there have been weeks that have been so busy that I’m still working on my message late at night on Saturday, let along reviewing my message. Thankfully this is rather rare, but it has happened a handful of times.

And often during those times that I feel behind and not as prepared as I’d like to be, that the enemy tries to make me feel anxious and worried. What if I’m not clear? What if my words do not convey what God wants conveyed? What if I miss something very important? Those kind of thoughts.

But it is at those times that the Lord has reminded me to not be anxious and to remember that the most important thing to do is pray. If there is only time for one thing, let it be prayer.

Are you anxious at times? Maybe it is when you feel behind. Perhaps it is over stress related to work or family. It could be all different reasons.

I believe these words of Paul to the church in Philippi will speak to every one of us on the importance of prayer in those moments.

Please turn with me to Philippians 4:4-9

**4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!** **5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.** **6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** **7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

**8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.** **9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.**

Paul writes, ‘do not be anxious about anything.’ What a statement! He writes this because we as human beings have a tendency to be anxious about everything! We are capable of fretting over big things and little things alike. And the news around us can be so loud that it is hard to avoid hearing it and then becoming anxious.

This is quite a task. And it is something we can’t do on our own. But with God’s help, now that’s a different story.

We need to remember that this human battle with anxiety is not really anything new. This tendency began long before us! Long before television and newspapers, long before radio and social media – people, including Christians still battle anxiety.

If this struggle was not real, why would Paul take the time to address it here in his letter. The truth is that Paul was certainly aware that there were things that the church in Philippi could be anxious about. There was the real threat of persecution from the Roman authorities. There were the rogue teachers that were trying to twist the good news of Jesus into some works-based message. And of course, as we looked at last week, there were two leaders in the church at Philippi that were in conflict with each other, which would threaten division and splitting within the church. All these things could make one anxious.

What is the solution that Paul gives? Prayer. Prayer, at least the Christian prayer, is really about communication between someone and God. Prayer is talking with our God and King and Savior.

Prayer strengthens one’s relationship with God. The proper place for prayer is at first place in our lives.

And one of the fruits of having prayer in its proper place is that God will enable His people to have victory over anxiety.

In this passage from Philippians, Paul describes several forms that prayer can take.

One expression of prayer is rejoicing or giving praise.

Paul writes, **“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**

Rejoicing in the Lord is an important aspect of prayer. Christians are to rejoice constantly in the Lord.

Certainly, it is easier to rejoice in the Lord when things seem to be going well. But when the day has not gone as planned and difficulties abound, that is still reason to rejoice.

In fact, those might be the most important times to rejoice. For even though circumstances can be very, very difficult, we can still rejoice in the Lord because God is a good and loving God. God is good, all the time. And all the time, God is good. God’s goodness is constant. And it is His goodness and mercy and love for us that people are called to rejoice in!

People can rejoice in the day even while not rejoicing in the specific circumstances. And just to be extra clear, as if to say, “Yeah, you heard me right!” Paul reiterates by saying “I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Truly, when prayer has its proper place in one’s life, there is a gentleness that will grow in them. Gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. This gentleness is to be seen by everyone and it is one way that Christians shine the light of love of Christ. The Lord wants us to be praying so that gentleness becomes more and more evident to everyone around us.

We are called to be gentle both with others as well as with ourselves. I have had times when God has instructed me to be gentle with myself. Sometimes our plates are so full that we are not able to spend as much time as we would like on some things. AND I FELT GOD WANTED ME TO BE GENTLE WITH MYSELF.

Paul reminds the church in Philippi that **“The Lord is near.”**

Sometimes people can be so anxious that they forget that God is near. Jesus says that He is never going to leave us or forsake us. His Spirit lives within us. And just an awareness of His presence can strengthen Christians against anxiety.

The Philippians are then instructed to remember that every situation is an opportunity to come before God in prayer.

He writes, **6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

So prayer, of various kinds, is God’s biggest antidote to anxiety. Pray with thanksgiving, offer requests and petitions to God. In essence, Christians are to turn everything into a prayer of some kind. And when this is done, God receives these prayers and gives His people peace. And His peace will help guard and protect the hearts and minds of Christians as anxiety and worry try to overtake them.

And as Paul writes, this peace is a peace that transcends all understanding. This means that even in the midst of the struggle and the challenge and the difficulty, God will give His peace – His shalom – to His children as they turn to Him in prayer.

And truly, no situation is too small or too big to ask God for his help. He is there and He offers peace in the midst of the anxiety. The Christians’ role is to turn to Him in prayer and God’s role is to help Christians find victory over anxiety. He will battle the anxiety within us as believers turn to Him.

A big part of winning this battle is for God’s people to be thinking in healthy ways. God wants His people’s minds to be dwelling on the right things. Verse eight reads, “**8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”**

This passage teaches us that what people choose to put into their mind matters a great deal. In speaking of the body, if all that someone ate was candy bars every day, it would take its toll on the body. The same is true, if not more so, for our minds, if all we are choosing to think about are things that God does not want us to be thinking about.

To put it another way, people need to think about what they are thinking about. When people choose to fill their minds with the things of God, it will make a big difference in their lives. Paul tells the Christians in Philippi to fill their minds with things that are truth and pure and lovely and admirable and excellent and praiseworthy.

And what will help people to fill their minds in these ways? Making prayer the #1 priority will impact our life tremendously.

When Christians fill their minds with those things, anxiety decreases dramatically.

There are so many things that we can fill minds with great anxiety. But God’s people are called to fill their minds with truth (not falsity). This is done through being in the Word of truth – the Bible and being in fellowship with the Spirit of Truth – the Holy Spirit.

And finally, Paul writes, **9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.**

In other words, Christians can find victory over anxiety and worry by following the example of those living in victory themselves.

Friends, as we consider today’s passage and its importance for us today, what is the main takeaway? And I believe that it is this. **As we choose to give prayer its proper place, we can win this war against anxiety and worry.**

As we pray in the midst of every emotion and circumstance, God will push out the anxiety that we all battle with. This doesn’t mean that we will never have anxiety, but that we will not be overcome by it.

I am reminded of the Book of Psalms. This is a collection of prayers of all different kinds. And it was a reminder to take everything in life and turn it into prayer in some way. And as we pray about everything, it will impact our thinking. The Lord will help us focus our thinking in ways that are life-giving for ourselves and for others.

We do this by consciously choosing to think about what we are thinking about. Choose to rejoice. Choose to give thanks. Choose to offer petitions to the Lord. Choose to think godly thoughts.

But again, all this flows from having prayer in its proper place for our lives. You are never too busy to pray. Prayer strengthens our walk with God and our witness in this world. And I’ll leave you with this --- there are many things that can fill our day, but there is nothing more important you can do than to pray.

Let us pray...

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