

Discipleship: Knowing God's Voice Well: the Bible Part 4A

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I. Introduction

When something so terrible happens that anxiety grips us, God says, "Don't be anxious about anything. Tell Me what's wrong and I'll put an impenetrable shield around your mind that will protect you from all anxiety, in fact, My peace will engulf you." Can God's words really protect us? If they can, how? How in the world can a simple promise found in the Bible get rid of life-crushing anxiety on the spot? When God says something, there's a story and power behind it.

II. Discipleship: Knowing God's Voice Well: the Bible

God promises to get rid of your anxiety the second you tell Him about it, In Philippians 4:6-7, God basically says, "Don't be anxious about anything. Instead, tell Me why you're anxious with confidence and gratitude and My peace will replace all your anxiety." Will this actually work and what does "with confidence and gratitude" mean? The question regarding Philippians 4:6-7 is this, what does God mean by it, why does He say it? To answer this we must meditate on its immediate and surrounding context as we ask, "What is God saying **to me** and what am **I** going to do about it?" The Bible is God's voice and He's speaking to **you**.

What's the context of Philippians 4:6-7?

1:1-30, Paul begins the letter by telling the Philippians that he joyfully thanks the Lord for them every chance he gets because they've been his support and partner in the Gospel from the very beginning. They're doing excellent and his prayer is that their walk with the Lord will get even better (1:3-11). Then he says something rather peculiar: he's actually overjoyed about all the suffering he went through (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-27—and he suffered another 6 years after this, Acts 20-28) because God's used it all to further the Gospel, even in Caesar's own house! (1:12-18, cf. 4:22). Why in the world would Paul look at his suffering this way? Is he nuts? God is explaining to us the meaning of Philippians 4:6-7 through the suffering of the apostle Paul. If Paul can go through hell and still smile, what is God saying to us about our crushing stress and what He can do about it?

Though he's in prison in Rome, he's confident that the Lord will release him and that he'll see the Philippians again so that he can help them advance in their walk and further their joy. But if he's executed, this would be far better because he will be face-to-face with Christ: for Paul to live is Christ and to die is gain (1:19-26). This sounds insane on several levels: he's in prison and this prison stay may end in death. So why is he so confident that the Lord will free him? Paul's been through a lot with the Lord; he's been close to death numerous times (2 Corinthians 11:23-27) but Paul knew that the Lord had a mission for him to reach the Gentiles, to show them how to walk closely with Him. Thus, he was genuinely convinced that the Lord wanted him to continue his work with the Philippians. But if that was not the Lord's will, then Paul was OK with giving up his life for the cause of Christ. He was in prison for proclaiming the Gospel of Christ and he was ready to die for the Lord. Why?! Because death ultimately cannot hurt Christians; if Caesar were to execute Paul, then the anxieties of his life would end but more importantly he would be face to face with his Lord! Do you hear what God is saying about Philippians 4:6-7? Not even death can (or should) cause you anxiety!

The Philippians are also undergoing persecution and suffering so he encourages them to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind as they strive together for the faith of the Gospel because like Paul, they have been chosen to suffer for Christ's sake (1:27-30). When the Philippians meditate on what the Lord has done for Paul, when they (and we) think about his sufferings and his life-threatening experiences including his current imprisonment in Rome and the fact that Paul is still smiling after everything that's happened to him, how should they (and we) handle their anxiety-inducing suffering? God wants them (and us) to realize that if we give our life to Him and say, "Do with it what you will," then even in the face of the worst suffering imaginable, He will protect us; He will sustain us...He will protect our hearts and minds from all anxiety.

2:1-11, In light of the fact that God can use Paul's sufferings, his life and death to further the Gospel of Christ and through it all Paul was still confident, strong, and overjoyed (1:1-30), Paul wants the Philippians to imitate this selfless behavior which is epitomized in the Son of God. That is, in light of the fact that God can use your suffering to save countless others, in light of the fact that even if you find yourself in a Roman prison and your life is on the line, God will either free you and continue His work of salvation or He will reward you by bringing you home through death and into the presence of His glorious Son Jesus Christ, in light of all this the Philippians need to walk in everything they have in Christ. In the face of their suffering, they need to walk in His encouragement, His loving comfort, His Spirit's fellowship, His affection, and His mercy. It would bring Paul much joy if they sought to have the same selfless mind as Jesus: He was God-Almighty, yet He didn't cling to His deity. Instead, He took on human flesh and became the bondservant who utterly obeyed God the Father, even to the point of death, His death on a brutal Cross. This is why God exalted Him and one day every knee will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father (2:1-11). This is what God can do with anxiety. His Son faced the worst anxiety imaginable, yet God the Father removed it and replaced it with His peace and strength, which enabled Him to face the worst physical and emotional pain any human ever had to endure (Matthew 26:36-56).

As the book of Philippians builds and builds, God starts to reveal what He means by, "Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." He wants us to look at Paul's life and how he handled his anxiety, He wants us to look at His Son's life and how He handled His anxiety: as Paul looked at all his suffering, he was grateful and overjoyed because of what God did with it. He was confident in what God could do, how He could save his life or take it, either way, Paul was OK with it all. Why? Because for Paul "to live [on and continue to serve] is Christ, and to die [and go to be with Christ in heaven] is gain." As Jesus looked at the suffering that lay before Him, knowing that He deserved none of it, knowing that He was God Almighty, He willingly gave us His life in service of the Father and God exalted Him for it. Thus, God wants us to see that suffering in His hands doesn't become paralyzing anxiety. Instead, it becomes a source of gratitude, a source of confidence, and a source of joy. How does He remove our anxiety? He opens our eyes to see things clearly, like Paul and His Son did.

III. Conclusion

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.