

The power of Prayer in a new year

Trey Richardson – 1-6-19

Welcome to 2019!

As our new year begins, let me ask you this question - what is it that you expect 2019 to hold for you? Do you expect things to be better this year than Last? Do you feel a bit of fear for the unknown days, weeks and months to come that will make up 2019? What will happen this year? How will your life be affected? What are the questions you have about what is coming? Is there anything that you are anxious about?

Looking to the unknown before us is risky, because it brings with it a level of anxiety. What is your level of anxiety for what the new year might bring?

Politics

- What will be the political climate as the balance of power in the Congress changes?
- How long will the government shutdown continue?
- How will the stock market perform? How will the Dow respond? How will my 401K be affected? Will the economy continue to grow?

Health

- Will my health be good this year?
- Will my current health insurance coverage be sufficient, will my premiums go up?
- Is my job safe, could I be laid off?

Finances

- What will my taxes be like this year?
- Did I spend too much on Christmas this year? (as the credit card bills start coming in)
- Will we finally need that new AC this year?
- Will my rent go up?

Family

- How will my kids do in school?
- Are they going to make good friends?
- How do I think about their screen time?

And it goes on and on Whatever your season and station in life, **there is much that can make us anxious.** Beginning a new year, can just bring our low-level anxiety onto the front burner, as we naturally look out over a new year before us. The truth is that anxiety is a reality for all of us. We are all anxious about something. Some of us live with a continual, unwanted high level of anxiety. Some of us do pretty well until “that certain thing happens, or doesn’t happen”, and then anxiety can begin to define you as well.

What if I told you that this morning I want to tell you have **you can live 2019 anxiety free.** Would It sound a bit like **‘fake news’** to you? Or one of the promises in an on-line a pop-up

advertisement that you make sure not to click on? Well, as incredulous as that sounds, that is the news I have for you today.

We can all identify with anxiety. Describing it is not the issue, responding to it in a way that keeps it from almost controlling us is the issue.

- Jerry Bridges – Accept the adversity and resist the anxiety. We do the opposite.

How do we do that? Does the **bible tell us how to respond to anxiety**? Well, the bible does address it, let's read it together:

SCRIPTURE:

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, 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 your minds in Christ Jesus.

The main point I have for you, what I would want each and every one to walk away with and remember this morning is –

The peace of God is always available through prayer

Prayer

As we look at this passage together today, I have three points –

- His presence with us
- His command to us
- His promise for us

I. His presence with us

- A. Our place to start is not in **verse 6**, where we typically start, but at the beginning of the sentence, which starts in the end of verse 5, **(5b) The Lord is at hand...** or more literally, **the Lord is near.**
- B. Typically, we hear this passage and feel that **the main focus is on us** and what we need to do differently, or better. The message is that when you are anxious... pray. You may feel that you are not praying enough as it is, and now to hear a message that says you need to be praying more is not helpful.
- C. This morning please look at this familiar passage in a different way. Let me explain borrowing this example I heard from another pastor...

- The only difference between the word **resume**, and the word **resume'** is where you place the accent. They are spelled exactly the same, but are **read very differently** because of where you place the accent. Our passage today is read very differently based on where you place the accent.
- D. I would like for us to see **where God places the accent in this passage**, and how it affects the way we read and apply it. This passage places the primary emphasis, or accent, on God not on you and I. There is a command here for us to follow, to be obedient in prayer, but this ability to be obedient in prayer, and **to overcome anxiety we will see is found in God**. God gives us hope to obey what he instructs us to do.
- E. What does this phrase, the Lord is at hand, say to us about God, before we hear anything that **we** are to do? What is he revealing about himself before he gives us a command to do, in this case, to not be anxious. This **beginning phrase about God** is intentional and placed here to show us where to begin as we face our fears.
- Its intention is to Lift our eyes from what we fear, and what we are anxious about, and place our eyes on God, to the one that is greater than all we fear.
- F. This phrase is telling us that **God is here, literally here** with us, right now He is with every believer. Does that truth affect your thinking this morning? What does this phrase tell us about God? **His presence with us is not a concept, it is a reality**.
- Matthew 28:20 – *And behold I am with you always to the end of the age.*
- G. He is with us, that means that **we are never alone**.
- He is not far away, ever, even when we feel that he is distant to us.
 - He is always here. This should inform every aspect of our lives. He is everywhere we are. Does that affect you this morning? God is present, speaking to us through his word!
 - Hebrews 13:5 - *...for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'*
- H. This phrase, *'The Lord is at hand'*, is also the apostle Paul bringing to them a glimpse of the gospel. *The Lord is at hand* because he has come to us.
- We just completed an **advent series** and marveled week after week about the wonder of God coming to us. He is at hand because he came as a child to rescue us from our sin.
 - Jesus came to live a sinless life, to die a substitutionary death on the Cross, to bring forgiveness for our sins through his death, and through His resurrection secured for us eternal life. This is the God who is with us, *'the*

Lord is at hand'. Because of the finished work of Christ, we have the Lord with us and even in us. As we heard last week:

- Ephesians 4:6 - *...one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*
- I. This truth that the '*Lord is at hand*' also acts as a **hinge** in this passage that affects what comes both before it as well as after it. Our focus this morning will be on what comes after it, how to respond to anxiety, but notice how it also affects verses 5.
- *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.*
- J. **Your reasonableness (or gentleness), should be known to everyone, both inside as well as outside of the church.** Our unity with other believers should be our example to all, as we heard last week from Jim preaching out of Ephesians 4. Through God, because He is with us, at hand, we can indeed be reasonable and gentle with one another. Our gentleness, harmony, unity should characterize our relationships together.
- K. **Do you hear how the accent falls on God?** He begins with helping us to focus on Him, not on us. Now let's look at the command he gives us to follow:

II. His command to us

- A. *...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything through prayer, supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*
- B. As we read this portion of the passage, we must remember this command to us is in light of the **first part of this sentence**. If we fail to do that, the accent quickly falls to us.
- C. We are very familiar with both the word anxiety, and also the experience of anxiety. But let's take a moment to ensure we understand how to think about anxiety. **Worry would be another way to express anxiety.** Worry is another word that is used to express the same response to our very real-life situations.
- D. But, is there a good anxiety? Is all worry sinful? Is concern worry? Is concern sinful? According to Timothy Lane in his good book – 'Living without Worry' – he makes a **distinction between worry and concern**. He says that Concern is a good thing. Concern takes wise action and prays dependently. The difficulty comes when it starts to become '**over-concern**', then it describes the sinful response of anxiety and worry.

- E. Overconcern is the point that you think and act as if everything depends upon you, and when things begin to seem out of control, and you find yourself desperate, and overwhelmed.
- Let me explain the difference between **concern and overconcern**. For example, to be concerned about your health is a good thing and an expression of that concern would be to plan for an annual medical checkup. That is simply wise thinking. To be ‘overconcerned’ about your health is to be pre-occupied with thinking about your health. That may prompt frequent trips on-line with every new symptom that you feel or notice, or hear about with a friend, all the while living with fear, thinking about what the symptoms could be.
 - There was an old TV show called ‘**Marcus Webley MD**’ that was a weekly show about a doctor and his medical practice. However, statistics revealed that the week following the showing of the program, there was a sharp increase of patients coming with concern that they had the very medical issue that was reviewed in the program. Concern is not worry, overconcern is worry.
- F. In our passage Paul instructs the Philippians how to respond to overconcern, worry or anxiety biblically. They were living in an age where there was **much to be overconcerned about**.
- They had an **agrarian society**, where daily food, shelter and clothing was not a guarantee.
 - There was no **governmental safety net** with support for those in need, like our welfare programs here in America. They would have had much to be anxious about.
 - In addition, **Christianity was not an accepted** religion by the government, or by society, so they faced religious persecution for their faith, in addition to providing for their physical needs each day.
 - As they hear this admonition from Paul, that the Lord is at hand, and because of that to not be anxious about their lives. Paul helped them (and us) to see that **God is great enough** to understand and meet all of our needs – whether we live in the 1st century or the 21st century.
- G. However, as we review this command from God for us to not be anxious, but to pray, let’s not miss where God places the accent, as he helps us to see the power he has over us and in our lives. Let’s listen closely again to hear how God speaks to us.... The passage says,
- *to not be anxious about **anything**, but in **everything** to pray.... ‘Anything’ and ‘everything’ are the words Paul, and God through Paul, uses words that is **completely comprehensive** over our lives and experiences. It excludes all exceptions. We all can see our life issues as exceptions of ones that have*

issues and needs are too great, or problems lasted too long, or situations that are too bad, etc.

- Here we can hear another expression of how the **accent falls on God** and not on us. This is telling us that there is nothing that will ever affect any believer's life that in some way falls into a category that is not included in God's invitation for us to come to Him in prayer when we are anxious about something.
- **There is absolutely nothing that He cannot carry with us**, nothing that we cannot depend on him through prayer, nothing that is beyond His care. Nothing!

H. Then he adds that we are to come in prayer **...with Thanksgiving...** We cannot see into this next year, we can only choose to trust the one who will shape next year. One thing that builds our trust is remembering and giving thanks to him for what he had done in the past. When we choose to trust God, then our ability to live life with anxiety at a controllable level becomes a reality. Thanksgiving changes our perspective.

- Last week we had an encouragement from our worship leader Zach Boomsma, drawing our attention to what God has done in our midst last year. As he did that, helping us to remember those this past year **saved and baptized, marriages healed, addicts freed, Christians maturing in Christ**, our perspectives were affected. Thanksgiving does that for us.

I. In addition, this invitation to bring thanksgiving in our prayer is gracious by God – because all you have to bring to God when you pray is your petitions, with your thanksgiving.

- God **requires no promises you will do better**, just come with a focus on what God has done for you and express it in thanksgiving. God wants to meet with you... calls us to prayer with him when we are faced with trials of all kinds and are anxious. What a glorious invitation!

J. Do you hear how the **accent falls on God** to affect how you read this passage?

III. His promise for us

A. *And the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

B. The desire we all have is for **God to answer our prayers and supplications**, and to bring **miraculous answers** to meet our very real needs that we lift our requests to Him in prayer. That would be wonderful, and at times that is exactly what God does. However, God promises more than that to us, **he promises us himself**. It is the very

peace of God, **God's peace**, that he gives to us in the midst of our temptations to be anxious.

- C. The very real promise that **he gives us himself and his very peace in the midst of trouble, all trouble**, every time, is his promise to us. God himself is not affected by anxieties, in essence he promises to give us the peace in which he lives. That means that regardless the trouble that comes our way, God is with us, at hand, bringing peace to our souls. **This peace is beyond what we can understand, but it is not beyond what we can experience. It is the promise of God.**
- D. This '*peace of God*' passes all understanding. The peace of God is a phrase that is not found anywhere else in the New Testament.
- 'That does not mean that the peace of God is such a mystery that man's mind cannot understand it, although that is also true. It means that the peace of God is so precious that man's mind with all of its skill and all of its knowledge, can never produce it.' William Barclay
- E. As Paul spoke to them of God being with them, of God bringing the peace of God to them in anxious moments, there was an example that came to their minds...they heard from a man who lived out what he spoke to them. How Paul first came to them when the church was established. God really does bring His peace.
- *Acts 16:22-26 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken.*
- F. **Paul and Silas had much to be anxious about**, but they had a response that was a reflection that the peace of God was with them even then. He understood and spoke to them and to us fully aware of even dangerous and life-threatening situations, and knowing nothing was able to restrict the promise of the peace of God affecting our lives even at these times. How did they respond? They were singing psalms, praising God even though they had been beaten and placed in chains. **The presence and peace of God was greater than their trial.**
- G. There is **even more** to this promise of giving us his peace. The Father, whose promises his peace will also guard them (us) in Christ Jesus. **Paul's use of "guard"** may reflect his own imprisonment in Rome or the status of Philippi as a Roman colony with a military garrison. However, the picture he paints for the idea of being

guarded by a military garrison would be vivid to them. They were experiencing Roman rule and occupation. The Roman military was the greatest most powerful military in the world and, Paul was saying here that **the peace of God guarding their hearts and minds was even greater than the military protection** they experienced. It is not Roman soldiers who guard believers—it is so much greater, it is the peace of God Almighty. Because God is sovereign and in control, Christians can entrust all their difficulties to him.

- ‘Paul does not expect that the answers to our prayers will most likely take us out of the problems, but our hearts and minds will be garrisoned by the peace of God.’ DA Carson

H. Finally, we see the at the end of our passage a reminder that of why we have all of this promised to us by God...because we are in Christ Jesus.

- *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
- We have these promises because in Christ, we have been:
 1. Justified
 2. Reconciled
 3. Adopted
 4. forgiven

I. This year, 2019, regardless with what is holds for all of us. God wants to give you his peace, in greater abundance than the trials we will face. The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians while imprisoned in Rome, and Paul with confidence, while in his current state, could encourage them with the reality of the peace of God.

J. Do you hear how the accent falls on God?

IV. Conclusion and Application

A. The main point that I would want you to remember out of the message this morning is this –

- **The peace of God is always available through prayer**

B. Some areas for application this morning:

- Follow the direction of scripture:

1. When you feel anxiety pressing in, at any moment, anytime, anywhere, take your anxious thoughts and convert them to prayerful expressions (supplications).
 2. The words used for guarding our 'minds' here can also be translated as our 'thoughts', and add thanksgiving to your prayer.
 3. If we spend more time praying about our situations than thinking about them, we will be following the direction of this passage, and ultimately experience the promise of this passage.
- Remember where the accent falls, on God, and not on us. We are called to come to the all-powerful God in prayer, with thanksgiving. God is at hand, God promises his peace and his protection to us in 2019. Let's take advantage of this promise!
 - If you are here this morning and you are not a Christian, please notice how the passage ends... *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
 1. This promise of peace and protection is for those who are in Christ Jesus, those who have placed believing faith in Christ Jesus and are saved. If you are not a Christian, please talk to a Christian friend, or a member here. We would love to help you see how God can meet you with his saving love, and that these promises can become your own.