

**"Pressing on with the Mission"
The Peace of Christ and the Mission
Philippians 4:2-9**

Introduction

- [Slide #1] Have you ever had an experience when everything around you slows down and time seems to stop? What do you call that when that happens? It happened to me once on the playground as a kid. It's recess. We're playing football. I was quarterback. And Antone Meaux, one of my childhood friends, and one of the fastest kids at Glendale Elementary School, runs a go route toward the end zone and as I see him break free and get open and time just stops. I can still picture this like it was yesterday. Everything is in super slow motion; suspended animation on the playground gridiron. And in the moment what I experience is a dead calm, perfectly at peace in my environment. It's just me and Antone. The pass rush stops. I don't hear any "one Mississippis." And I see myself throw, in slow-motion, this bomb to Antone, a perfect pass. He catches it for a touchdown. And then the moment's over and everything speeds up again.
- Philippians chapter 3 has been like that for me. Super slow motion where all of life slows down, all of life freezes and all I see is me and Christ. Suspended animation. Super slow motion—me and Jesus. He is my righteousness. He is all I see. He is my vision, my goal, my target. Christ is the heavenly prize. Perfectly at peace with God through my Savior. And I have wanted to stay in that moment, to always have those thoughts about Christ in the forefront of my mind and to savor and enjoy Jesus.
- One of the great Puritan writers [John Bunyan](#) in his autobiographical book *Grace Abounding* puts what I'm trying to say like this. He said, "One day as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest all was still not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, *Your righteousness is in heaven*. And I thought as well that I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand. There, I say, is my righteousness, so that wherever I was or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he lacks my righteousness, for [Jesus was always] before Him. I also saw that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday and today and forever."
- And then [Bunyan](#) says in response to this, "Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. . . . I went home rejoicing for the grace and love of God. . . . [Here's the frozen moment in time, the suspended animation.] Here I lived for some time, very sweetly at **peace** with God through Christ. Oh, I thought, Christ! Christ! There was nothing but Christ before my eyes."¹
- That's what Philippians 3 has been for me. But it is so hard to stay there. Everything in this world is bent on upsetting that joy and that peace in Jesus. We have so much going against us in this regard. See I think this is right where Paul is at by the time we transition out of Philippians 3 and into Philippians 4; we find ourselves at the intersection of this peace and

¹ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* (Philadelphia, 1859), page 75.

tranquility and joy in Jesus, where there is nothing but Christ before our eyes, and then everything in this world that threatens to undo that sweet peace.

Transition

Very simply, I think the lesson for us from **Philippians 4:2-9** is this...[Slide #2]

Big Idea

- **You can't, you won't be on the mission if you're not resting in the peace of Christ**
- This whole passage is about peace. Look at the text. Verses 2-3. There is this lack of relational peace between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. Then verses 4-7 Paul highlights the anxiety and worry that threaten to undo our peace of mind. And finally in verses 8-9 Paul speaks of the peace that comes from putting what we know about God and the Christian life into practice.
- And Paul's point I think is this. The mission is all about Jesus. He is the object and subject of the mission. We are to ache to know Christ more and find our enjoyment in Christ alone. And as we do that we will attract followers to Christ our prize. We are to live all of life in that space like when Bunyan says, "Here I lived for some time, very sweetly at **peace** with God through Christ. Oh, I thought, Christ! Christ! There was nothing but Christ before my eyes." And the moment we cease inhabiting that peace and joy in Jesus, the moment we allow anxiety or disharmony or unrest to characterize our life instead of this joy and peace in Jesus is the moment the progress of the Gospel and the mission come to a standstill. Anxiety and worry and lack of peace and relational discord are at odds with the mission. **You can't, you won't be on the mission if you're not resting in the peace of Christ.**
- Again, we have so much going against us. Just think about where we've come from in the last five hundred years. Five hundred years ago life was difficult, yes. Children died young. Bubonic plague. Yes. But for the most part all that you had to worry about was local stuff; stuff the town crier shouted at noon. No one had to carry the weight of international affairs on their shoulders. And in the last five hundred years we've gone from the printing press to the telegraph to the telephone to the radio to Satellites to the internet to mobile communication so that if war breaks out or earthquakes strike or terrorists attack on the other side of the world we instantly notified and invited to worry. Add to this all the personal stuff we all deal with. Job changes and job loss. "Car troubles, conflict with colleagues at work, impending exams, the expectations of family and friends, competition at work, a degenerating family, an arid marriage, a rebellious teenager, bereavement, financial insecurity."² And we could go on and on.
- This is the reality of life. And somehow God expects and wants the mission Jesus launched to go on through us in spite of all of this stuff. How? The peace of Christ. His peace resting on us. As followers of Jesus we are to bring the message of peace with God through the blood of Christ; we are to be characterized by this peace. And if we aren't resting in this peace what makes us think we'll be effective on Jesus' mission? **You can't, you won't be on the mission if you're not resting in the peace of Christ.**

Transition

² Don Carson, *Basics for Believers*, p. 110-111.

Look at the text. Look at what Paul points out. He points out...

Organizational Sentence

- **Three areas where the peace of Christ is commonly breached**

Transition

First [verses 2-3](#). Listen.

Main Points

- *I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*
- Most of the world, most of your friends and neighbors are in a state of relational disarray. That's not supposed to be the case in God's family. If you are a Christian believer and your personal relationships are in a state of total disarray there can't, there won't be this thing called Jesus' mission. [Slide #3] **The mission requires harmony—relational peace among believers.**
- Look at verse 2. It is totally shocking that Paul calls out these two women. We're used to naming names—calling people out for things. Usually Paul doesn't do this; usually he calls people out anonymously. In this instance he names names. He cares too much for these two women to not call them by name. By the way, don't for a second think that it's only because they're women that Paul calls for a stop to the catfight; as if men never disagree and always get along. Us men, we're just as bad. In fact, we're probably worse when it comes to disagreements. We just sweep it under the rug and ignore the problem and put a good face on things.
- Too much is at stake in this personal disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche. At issue is not some petty quarrel between two people; the progress of the gospel in the Philippian church is at stake.³ These women, Paul says, have labored with him, contended with him and at his side for the cause of the gospel. And their personal disagreement, their lack of relational peace threatens this mission. The outward push of the gospel, the good news of peace with God through the blood of Christ, stops if the relational discord between these two women continues—which is why Paul calls them out by name. There are ecclesiastical, church-wide repercussions to their disagreement.⁴
- I wish what Paul has written here wasn't so relevant, but it is. In church after church after church after church in this town, and all over for that matter, the mission Jesus launched has ground to a halt, the outward push of the gospel gets closeted because believers can't get along. If Jesus, by the blood of his cross, has reconciled us to God, made peace with God, if he is our peace then Christian believers must absolutely be reconciled to one another. Period. If there is someone here you can't talk to, someone you avoid seeing because of some disagreement, you have an obligation, before this day ends, to humble yourself, and to go to that other person end it.

³ Fee, p. 397.

⁴ Martin, p. 168.

- And that doesn't just go for the people in these four walls. If there is a brother or sister in Christ out there that you have an ongoing disagreement with you have an obligation to end that disagreement today.
- I love what Paul does. Look at how he calls these two women out. Look at the text. Paul, as an apostle, doesn't throw his weight around and these two women under the bus. He doesn't, as one commentator said, "begin with heavy-handed authority. He doesn't cite his apostolic credentials and whittle them down to size."⁵ He pleads with them. He begs them to agree in the Lord. And so I too plead with you this morning, be reconciled to one another. Repair the breach in the relationship; make peace, *agree with each other in the Lord*, so that the mission of Christ can go forward. What does it mean to agree in the Lord? It's more than just burying the hatchet. As Don Carson says, "Paul is appealing for a mental attitude that adopts the same basic direction as other believers, the same fundamental aim, the same orientation and priorities—that is, a gospel orientation."⁶
- Look ahead to [verse 5](#). *Let your gentleness be evident to all*. Gentleness, or as some translations put it, reasonableness, simply being reasonable, goes a long way toward preserving relational peace. That word gentleness "suggests the ability to remain reasonable and unperturbed when confronted by difficult people and to treat them calmly and fairly."⁷ Christians are to treat people with sweet reasonableness.
- And if you can't come to an agreement, or if one or both parties continue to be unreasonable and difficult and stiff necked, get a mediator. Look at the text. [Verse 3](#). Seek out a third-party, someone like this *loyal yokefellow* that Paul appeals to in [verse 3](#) to *help these women* come to agreement and peace.
- Too much is at stake with this relational discord. Very quickly I want to draw your attention to a verse from the book of Hebrews that helps explain what's at stake. **Hebrews 12:14**. There it says, *make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord*. You can, I think, take this verse in two ways. If any person wants entry into the Kingdom of heaven, to see the Lord, and hasn't or can't or won't make peace with others, they are deluded. Won't happen. But it can also be taken differently. Think of it from the perspective of those on the outside of the Kingdom looking in and observing believers and the way we treat one another. *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord*. The mission is to point people to Jesus. If we are at odds with each other and can't live in *peace with all men*; no one will see the Lord. They won't see Jesus. All they'll see is our relational discord and miss out on Jesus. So very much is at stake.
- "God is a peacemaker. Jesus Christ is a peacemaker. So, if we want to be God's children and Christ's disciples, we must be peacemakers too."⁸ *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*⁹

Transition

⁵ Carson, p. 101.

⁶ Carson, p. 102.

⁷ Marshall, p. 112.

⁸ John Stott, *Authentic Christianity*, edited by Timothy Dudley-Smith, p. 360.

⁹ Matthew 5:9

There is a **second area** where the peace of Christ is commonly breached. Look at **verses 4-7**. [Slide #4] **It's our peace of mind**. These are familiar verses. Pay extra attention.

- *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 everything, 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.*
- These things, anxiety, worry are huge problems. Google one word, worry, 97 million pages return. The amount of money spent every year on drugs and therapy to combat anxiety and worry is staggering. I'm not saying that in some cases those things aren't justified. Please don't mishear me. What I am saying is that prayer, not therapy or meds, needs to be our first line of defense. I want you to imagine a conversation, a dialogue between Richland Center and Jesus. What if Richland Center went in for therapy and found out that Jesus was the counselor?¹⁰ This conversation isn't original to me. I've borrowed and edited.
- **Richland Center:** I'm tired. Really tired. Especially tired of failing and then covering it up with a smile.
 - **Jesus:** "I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground."
- **Richland Center:** I can't see that. And it's not just me. The whole world is a mess. What about 9/11? What about Haiti? What about all the horrible things that keep happening?
 - **Jesus:** "I form light and I create darkness. I make well-being and I create calamity. I am the Lord, who does all these things."
- **Richland Center:** That scares me. I don't want one God over all. I want many spiritual paths, all okay. That leaves me in control.
 - **Jesus:** "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other."
- **Richland Center:** So let's say you are God. Let's say you even love me. But why? You know all my secrets. Why do you love me?
 - **Jesus:** "For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another."
- **Richland Center:** If I open my heart to you, don't I risk ending up a fool? What if you fail, like everything else in my life?
 - **Jesus:** "By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance."
- **Richland Center:** And if I refuse?
 - **Jesus:** "There is no **peace**, says the Lord, for the wicked."
- **Richland Center:** And if I say yes?

¹⁰Ray Ortland, *What if Nashville went in for therapy – and found that the counselor was Jesus?*, October 27, 2009, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/rayortlund/2009/10/27/what-if-nashville-went-in-for-therapy/>

- **Jesus:** “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”
- **Richland Center:** But I’m so sinful.
 - **Jesus:** “I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.”
- **Richland Center:** But I’m so weak, so very weak.
 - **Jesus:** “A bruised reed I will not break, and a faintly burning wick I will not quench. I will lead the blind in a way they do not know, in paths they have not known I will guide them. I do not forsake them.”
- **Richland Center:** But I am so anxious. I worry so much—about everything.
 - **Jesus:** *The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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.*
- If you haven’t already done so, I want you to start making a list, either mental or on a piece of paper, of all the things that are causing you anxiety and worry right now. Unemployment. Lack of health. Bills. Tests. Taxes. Family issues. The future. Whatever. Listen to me. Your Lord is near. **Verse 5.** *The Lord is near.* He is near you. And it’s because Jesus our Lord is near, it’s because he is ever present, that we don’t have to worry. Instead, we’re called to pray.¹¹ Jesus is not far off or removed from your trouble. He is near. So pray. *Present your requests to God*, in the presence of God. Prayer is the key to not worrying. Quoting an older saint one commentator said, “anxiety and genuine prayer are more opposed to each other than fire and water. I have yet to meet a chronic worrier who enjoys an excellent prayer life.”¹²
- And Paul says, pray *with thanksgiving*. He doesn’t just tell us not to be anxious, not to worry. Paul tells us how to avoid anxiety and worry altogether. Pray with thanksgiving. Give thanks and pour your heart out to Jesus who is near and something will happen. **Verse 7.** *And the peace of God, the peace produced by God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* God will produce peace in your life that will act as a guard, a shield protecting you from worry and anxiety.
- Do you see how this connects with the mission? Your peace of mind, or lack thereof, is intimately connected to the mission. If we are so consumed with worry and anxiety we will never have the mental energy left to think of serving and loving our neighbors and friends. The mission dies with the unrest in our heads. Don’t be content with chronic worry or living every single moment of every single day consumed with anxiety and apprehension. Unrest and disharmony, even if it’s just your peace of mind, hinders the progress of the Gospel. Give your head a rest and, **1 Peter 5:7**, *cast all your anxiety on [God] because he cares for you.* If you are a Christian believer **the mission depends on you battling the unrest in your mind through prayer.**

Transition

¹¹ Fee, p. 408.

¹² Carson, p. 112.

Very briefly. Verses 8-9, the **third area** where the peace of Christ is commonly breached. The first is our relationships. The second is our peace of mind. The third is our obedience. [Slide #5] **Seek the peace that comes from right thoughts leading to right actions.**

- We are in the homestretch run of this letter. *Finally, brothers, 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.*
- Thoughts determine behavior. You know that right? What you believe always gets translated into how you live. If you believe your food to be poisoned, you don't eat it. If you believe it's going to rain, you carry an umbrella. In **verse 8** Paul has cast a wide net with six very broad adjectives—truth, nobleness, uprightness, purity, pleasing or lovely things, admirable things.¹³ And he says *think about such things*. What percentage of your thoughts each day might fall into the six categories Paul lists in **verse 8**?
- Paul says to think about such things because how we think, right thoughts, good thoughts, get translated into how we live. GIGO. Garbage in, garbage out. If you are filling your mind *pure* things—whatever is not tainted or besmirched by evil, yes I just used the word besmirched, then your actions will likely reflect those thoughts.¹⁴ And the opposite is equally true. Fill your mind with dirty, defiled things the result is dirty, defiled behavior.
- Which is why Paul says in **verse 9** *whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice*. The command to *think about such things* is immediately followed by the command *put it into practice*. And all together, good thoughts, leading to good actions, produces peace. *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*. This is another promise. In other words, think these things which leads to putting them into practice and the God of peace will be with you. God himself will be with you. The gift of God's peace can't be separated from his presence.¹⁵ Obedience, the product of right thinking, produces the peace-giving presence of God in a person's life.
- Do you see how this connects with the mission? Christ is our peace. **Colossians 1**. *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making **peace** by the blood of his cross*. We are to live all of life in that space like when Bunyan says, "Here I lived for some time, very sweetly at **peace** with God through Christ. Oh, I thought, Christ! Christ! There was nothing but Christ before my eyes." And the moment we cease inhabiting that peace and joy in Jesus is the moment anxiety and worry creep in. Our relationships erode—conflict ensues. Or our thoughts turn to things less noble, less pure, less lovely than the cross of Christ and Satan gets a foothold through some chaos producing behavior. And in that lack of peace the mission of the church dies. Anxiety, worry, personal disagreements, actions and behaviors that produce chaos in your life are at odds with the mission. **You can't, you won't be on the mission if you're not resting in the peace of Christ.**

¹³ Fee, p. 417.

¹⁴ Fee, p. 418.

¹⁵ O'Brien, p. 512.

Conclusion

- **Isaiah 53:4-5** *Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.*
- As a church may we continue to press on with the mission, working, laboring to see the Gospel expand to new places, new peoples, new towns, because we ourselves have been healed and are resting in Christ our peace.