

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:

“4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

'Why Do We Fret'

My sermon title has a term that we don't often use today, but it is at the center of the wisdom I want us to find in Psalm 37, as well as Psalm 73, and of course that wisdom relates to the text that I read from Philippians. King David begins by saying, “Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.”

➤ **So what does it mean to fret?**

There is a classic scene in one of my favorite movies, Chariots of Fire [which has many classic scenes] where we see Eric Liddell's sister fretting about all of his running. After Eric is late for a missionary meetings she tells him in a very troubled voice, “Your mind's not with us any more, son. It's full of running and starting and medals and pace. It's so full of it, you've no room for standing still.”

Eric puts his arms on her shoulders and says gently, “Jennie, Jennie, Jennie! Don't fret yourself.”, but she quickly responds, “I do fret myself, Eric. I'm frightened for you. I'm frightened for what it all might do to you.” Jennie could only see the importance of Eric's call to the ministry and thought his running was a distraction. Eric takes her aside to assure her that he had made the decision to go to China, but first had to take up the Olympian challenge of 1924 because he said that God had made him fast and when he ran he felt God's pleasure!

Don't want to spoil the movie, but we know in the end God used Eric mightily in both areas.

➤ **Our task this afternoon is to better learn how to obey these commands to not fret nor be anxious, which are both important commands in our lives?**

To begin, I want to remind us that there are basically three ways to view things and which we choose makes quite a difference about our fret level:

➤ **The first option is to view everything through our own eyes, what Frank Sinatra famously called doing it “My Way.”**

Here I become the final authority on what is right and wrong and responsible for everything in my life: That certainly gives one lots and lots to be anxious about & why so many famous people are on drugs!

➤ **The Second option is to see things from the world's perspective, and by that we mean just the material non-Christian world.**

This is where most are today, and we must remember that when there are no absolutes by which to judge leaders or experts, then what these leaders say becomes the absolute. While this might relieve some of the personal anxieties by having someone else be responsible, sadly we then live in a world of tension as different leaders battle to be the top dog!

As the election approaches on Tuesday we see this from all sides in our nation. Conservatives tell us that IF we vote for the liberal it will be the end of civilization and the liberals tell us that if we vote conservative it is the end of democracy as we know it.

- A TV host recently said that one party's 'nasty' ads attacking the other side were just like what Goebbels did in Nazi Germany, without even noticing the irony.

Having groups of men & women establish the "truth" of things always leads to tribalism and with that, lots & lots of anxiety and things to fret about!

- The third option comes from both King David and the Apostle Paul where we are encouraged to see things from God's perspective.

We also see this from Asaph in Psalm 73 where he was troubled by the prosperity of the wicked. He saw no consequences for their wickedness with their strength being firm and not in trouble.

Asaph was troubled because he was only seeing things in the second way with history full of wickedness that did not seem to be punished. We could relate today with how he saw them wearing their pride as a necklace; and wearing violence as a garment.

- Does Planned Parenthood's slogan, 'my body my choice come to mind?'

We could think of Bill Gates or George Soros as we read verse 7 'Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish.'

Their arrogance even reaches to the heavens when they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"

- How often when we see some of today's wickedness have we thought God should quickly judge this or that wickedness, thinking 'if I were in charge of lightning bolts.'

And thus at verse 12 we see just this type of frustration when Asaph says: "Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches."

Remember the three ways to see the world? From myself, from the world or from God's perspective!

- We see the importance of that third way, when the Psalmist honestly says:

"When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me—"

I will be so bold this morning as to say that ALL anxiety comes from a failure to see things from God's perspective!

- Let me repeat that, ALL anxiety comes from a failure to see things from God's perspective!

This is exactly what we see when Asaph continues his meditation in Psalm 73:

"When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me—17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. 18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. 19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment!"

Asaph could see past the anxieties caused by such wickedness when he saw things from God's perspective!

- Before we go on, you might ask what does it mean to enter the sanctuary of God today?

Asaph or King David could see and enter the Temple of God, but what about today?

Before the coming of Christ, God used the altars, tabernacles and temples of the OT as the means to demonstrate His presence to His people.

We need to understand that He continues to use means as we live out history today:

We can come to better see things from God's perspective when we:

- **Read and meditate on His Word!**
- **When we approach His very Throne of Grace with our prayers.**
- **When we respond to God's call to gather weekly for worship in His very presence.**

Before we dig into Psalm 37, let me begin with a simple definition:

The Open Bible defines anxiety [or fretting] as “a disturbed state of mind produced by real or imaginary fears.” I think we can all agree that worrying about imaginary fears is pretty foolish, and thus what we should wrestle with today is how we deal with real fears! And of course, IF we do not handle them well, it will lead to more & more imaginary fears in our lives as well.

- **Just as it is with a root of bitterness which can be a very dangerous spiral that takes us to dark places, so unfounded fears can do the same leading to more fear.**

So the key question is how do we avoid being anxious when we have gotten ourselves into such messes, be they large or small? I could say, just be anxious for nothing, but the Bible has much more to teach us than just that simple, albeit important summary of the topic.

To help us overcome those real & imagined fears by fully putting our trust in God... let us consider a few of the principles we find in Psalm 37 and if you are one who is struggling with any of those real or imagined fears, it would be a good place to spend some time in study and meditation in your daily devotions as well!

King David begins with this: 37 “Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.”

- **Now of course the evildoers and workers of iniquity present very real fears & so David quickly tells us why we need not be anxious even in the face of real fears:**

2 “For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, & wither as the green herb.”

Now since this was penned about 3,000 years ago and evildoers are still among us it is clearly taking the long view...

- **And taking the long view is very important when it comes to quieting our fears to avoid fretting!**

King David had his moments as well and thus he is inspired to give some very practical advice to keep us on the right track & confident: 3 “Trust in Jehovah, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.” If we study & meditate on this important Psalm we find that we are to not only ‘trust in the Lord,’ but to 4 Delight ourselves also in the Lord, 5 Commit our way to the Lord, 7 to Rest in the Lord, and to wait patiently for Him;

- **It is very difficult to be afraid of real or imagined things in this world if we are doing what is commanded here!**

The Apostle Paul says, ‘be anxious for nothing’ and King David says: “Do not fret—it only causes harm.”

Now of course we quickly want to remind both the King and the Apostle that some of the things I am worried about are really very important and besides who else is going worry about those things that could do real harm to myself or my family!

- **But you see, BOTH of these men, writing under that inspiration of the Holy Spirit remind us that we are missing the BIG picture!**

Paul clearly points us to prayer and supplication rather than worry and King David goes on in this Psalm to boldly say that the evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the Lord, They shall inherit the earth.” And keeping our focus on the Lord and the big picture allows us to declare honestly with King David: 10 “For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more. 11 But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

- That is clearly where history is going and these wise men are reminding us that God does not need us to worry about even the smallest details, when we remember to see things from God’s perspective!

Yes, God uses means and we as the Church are the instrument that the Spirit of God uses to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus, but our job is to obey, not to worry!

So we have examples to learn from these Psalms and a good deal more instruction to be found in the OT:

- But the New Testament is by no means silent on this important topic and so a quick survey about how to handle our various worries might be in order, be they large or small!

First and foremost, we are to trust the Spirit of God as He carries out His work: Mark 13: “9 “But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them... 11 But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.”

- Of course, IF we are to trust the Spirit in this way when it comes to major events like giving speeches or being martyred, then what do you think we should do in the little things, like how to discuss an issue with my husband or wife?

Our trust in the Lord reminds us not to trust in other things and in our materialistic world there is perhaps no greater danger than the temptation of trusting in riches: Consider the second thing that King Agur requested in Proverbs chapter thirty: “Give me neither poverty nor riches— Feed me with the food allotted to me; 9 Lest I be full and deny You, And say, “Who is the Lord?” Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.”

We see Jesus warning us about this at Luke 12:13 “Then one from the crowd said to [Jesus], “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” 14 But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” 15 And He said to them, “Take heed & beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ 18 So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”’ 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ 21 “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Truly this man was worried about the wrong things and it cost him dearly in the end...

- Yes, we do find many, many things to worry about and the more things that we have the more we seem to worry, forgetting that all which we have is a gift from God!
- And, we certainly do not have as much control over those gifts as we like to think we do.

In Luke 12, Jesus also stresses this lesson upon His disciples: “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on.

23 Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them.

Of how much more value are you than the birds? 25 And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 26 If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; & yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? 29 “And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. 30 For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. 31 But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. 32 “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys.

➤ 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Romans chapter 8 is of course a place that we should often turn to for such comfort which is why we use it so often in our worship as we did this afternoon....

Apostle Peter joins the ‘do not fret’ chorus in I Peter 5 with this advice: 5 “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

And this should not surprise us because the more we understand the mighty hand of God, the more all of those fears, real or imagined, will fade into the background of our lives!

And that is why the Apostle Paul can state the command so boldly in the passage from Philippians...

➤ And he does so right in the midst of some major strife and conflict he heard about in their young church:

4:1 “Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. 2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

And so the bottom line is that IF we want to be those who know the peace that surpasses understanding we must be those who rejoice rather than fear...

Those who trust rather than fret!

➤ Living as those who see all things from God’s perspective rather than our own or the world’s!

And the Apostle Paul even goes on to tell us that we can follow his example: 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Communion Meditation: Psalm 37

“39 But the salvation of the righteous is from Jehovah; He is their strength in the time of trouble.
40 And Jehovah shall help them and deliver them;
He shall deliver them from the wicked, And save them,
Because they trust in Him.”