

17 – Think On This

June 28, 2020

“Worry”

In the light of our world’s current issues with the coronavirus, protests, economic stresses, and governments using people as pawns on their political chessboards, quoting Bible verses about worry or using trite euphemisms feels a little uncaring. Given the seriousness of current events on our world’s stage worrying seems inevitable. Its hard not to worry and if you are going to refer to Bible verses you almost need to have earned the right. If a millionaire says, “Don’t worry, things will work out”, we may know its true but his insensitivity is also true. Mother Teresa could quote Luke and say *Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?* She earned that right. Richard Wurmbrand, from Voice of the Martyrs could say, *“you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will...’”* Ja.4:14,15 He earned the right. A very wise and elderly gentleman once said to me, “Pastor, if I thought that worry could help I would devote one day a week to do nothing but worry the entire day”. He experienced the death of his 34-year-old daughter who left behind three little girls. He earned the right.

The Apostle Paul was one of those who’d also earned the right. We don’t know for sure that the people of Philippi were worried for Paul when he was imprisoned again in Rome but he does write them to say, *“Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear”*. Phil.1:12-14

It seems clear from these words that Paul is offering some words of comfort and he is doing so by pointing out the positive. He is not ignoring his difficult circumstances. He is just pointing out what God is doing in the midst of this hardship. I am thinking that perhaps we could be doing something similar. It may be an interesting exercise to lament the losses we experience due to covid 19 and racism but then to also acknowledge the gifts that these circumstances have given us.

Just on the covid issue people are grieving real and hard losses. Loss of weddings, family reunions, attending funerals of loved ones, missed school trips and classroom times, and worship and fellowship times are just a few. There are smaller losses as well – losses that are also real and feel sad. Try writing them out on paper and pinning them up on a wall and taking some time to lament those losses. Some examples of lament can be found in the following Psalms ... Ps. 12; 13; 25:1-2;16-21; 31:1-5;9-16; 86:1-4;14-17 You can use some of these words to speak out together as a family and then recite a prayer that you craft together.

Then alongside those losses or on another wall record all the gifts we have received. Drive by birthday parties, more regular video time with other family, family meal times, playing games with family, celebrating healthcare professionals and appreciating others in creative ways, deeper prayer times, different church services and more. Here you can post some passages on worry and God's provision and faithfulness.

These activities are different and may seem or feel awkward but they shouldn't. The 'tried and true' traditions and habits of our 'normal' religious behaviors may no longer serve as safe hand holds and foot holds on this new path of church life. Uncertainty is our new normal. The decisions of our leadership are all shrouded in "IF". We can do this "IF...", we might be able to do that "IF...". Solutions for problems may no longer be long term solutions and lots of them may be conditional. "IF....."

We are definitely "feeling the pinch" of covid 19. A pinch is when our options are severely limited. When we experience a "pinch" it generally hurts and leaves little space for healthy conversation. But Christians should not be deterred by a 'pinch'. Seeing things from a limited perspective should be our normal. After all our way is not God's way. Our faith should actually lead us to be open to the possibility that things may be different than they appear.

The Apostle Paul is put in jail and the jailer and his entire family are saved. He's in a pinch when he is in chains in Rome and the 'Guards' hear the gospel and the church becomes more confident. Perhaps there is something in this time for the church today as well. We have been guilty of typically stifling healthy conversation by assuming there is only one correct way of doing things. We needed reminding that the mission does not change but the method can and must. We no longer use the old methods of our ancestors and behold churches now have an online presence.

We have also stifled healthy dialogue when we assumed an 'either or' decision had to be made. We stifled conversation when we believed our thoughts and feelings were personal things not to be shared with others or when we just quietly backed off and did our own thing when we found what we felt suited us better. But if we are to be Spirit-led people we need to be open to the possibility that things may be different than they appear.

We are after all more than just a group of humans. We are HIS BODY and it is the HOLY SPIRIT that holds us together. Maybe we should not just fall back into the previous 'normal'. Maybe this time of sitting in a mess is a good time to listen together to what God is saying through all this. Paul tells the people of Philippi, *"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Phil.1:9-11"*

Paul's point is not that the Philippians gain more knowledge as in information but that their own experience of being in a pinch brings them more knowledge of God, more intimate knowledge, a more biblical knowing through experience. That is the type of knowing that helps our love to abound. If "right information" was all that we needed God could have just sent us a telegram or an email instead of His Son. In a world beset with sin and a predisposition towards division, polarization, decline, atrophy and death resurrection gives real and true hope. While the rest of the world seems wrapped up in a death dance Jesus is leading a resurrection parade. There should always be the possibility of something new, something unlikely but fresh and surprising. After all, *"what you sow does not come to life unless it dies."* 1 Cor.15:36

This is a great time for us to both lament the church and celebrate new gifts. Now is a great time for healthy conversations and more vulnerability and more courageous steps of faith. What a wonderful time for practicing new ways of listening to our Lord and being Spirit-led people, people unafraid of what the world may do and more focused on what Christ can and will do. God is no more surprised by our world's current events than we are by our own birthdays. He saw it coming and has a plan and we are part of it. PRAISE GOD.

This hymn speaks the word of God in a way that rings true for all time and should be celebrated with the dancing shoes of Christ's resurrection parade.

Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah

Psalm 146

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| 1. Hallelujah, praise Jehovah,
O my soul, Jehovah praise;
I will sing the glorious praises
Of my God through all my days.
Put no confidence in princes,
Nor for help on man depend;
He shall die, to dust returning,
And his purposes shall end. | 3. Food he daily gives the hungry,
Makes the sightless eyes to see.
Sets the mourning prisoner free,
Raises those bowed down with anguish,
Well Jehovah loves the righteous,
And the stranger he befriends,
Helps the fatherless and widow,
Judgment on the wicked sends. |
| 2. Happy is the man that chooses
Israel's God to be his aid;
He is blessed whose hope of blessing
On the Lord his God is stayed.
Heaven and earth the Lord created,
Seas and all that they contain;
He delivers from oppression,
Righteousness he will maintain. | 4. Hallelujah, praise Jehovah,
O my soul, Jehovah praise;
I will sing the glorious praises
Of my God through all my days.
Over all God reigns for ever,
Through all ages he is king;
Unto him, thy God, O Zion,
Joyful hallelujahs sing. |

**Confession to be read together from
The Heidelberg Catechism**

Lord's Day 9 Q & A 26

Q. What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them,¹ who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence,² is my God and Father because of Christ the Son.³

I trust God so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul,⁴ and will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends upon me in this sad world.⁵ God is able to do this because he is almighty God⁶ and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.⁷

¹ Gen. 1-2; Ex. 20:11; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 44:24; Acts 4:24; 14:15

² Ps. 104; Matt. 6:30; 10:29; Eph. 1:11

³ John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:5

⁴ Ps. 55:22; Matt. 6:25-26; Luke 12:22-31

⁵ Rom. 8:28

⁶ Gen. 18:14; Rom. 8:31-39

⁷ Matt. 7:9-11

Lord's Day 10 Q & A 27

Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. The almighty and ever present power of God¹ by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures,² and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—³ all things, in fact, come to us not by chance⁴ but by his fatherly hand.⁵

¹ Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-28

² Heb. 1:3

³ Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:15-17/a>; John 9:3; Prov. 22:2

⁴ Prov. 16:33

⁵ Matt. 10:29

*May the Lord Bless you and keep.
May he cause his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.
May he turn his face towards you and grant you his peace.*

Blessings in Christ,
Pastor Kasey VanderVeen.