

“Like Jesus: Peace, Patience, Contentment” | Rev. Greg Grooms | October 25, 2020

OLD TESTAMENT READING

**Numbers 6:22-37**

<sup>22</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,  
<sup>23</sup> “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying,  
Thus you shall bless the people of Israel:  
you shall say to them,

<sup>24</sup> The LORD bless you and keep you;  
<sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face to shine upon  
you and be gracious to you;  
<sup>26</sup> the LORD lift up his countenance<sup>[a]</sup> upon  
you and give you peace.

<sup>27</sup> “So shall they put my name upon the  
people of Israel, and I will bless them.

EPISTLE READING

**Philippians 4:4-13**

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will  
say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness<sup>[a]</sup> be  
known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;  
<sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in  
everything by prayer and supplication with  
thanksgiving let your requests be made  
known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God,  
which surpasses all understanding, will  
guard your hearts and your minds in Christ  
Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true,  
whatever is honorable, whatever is just,  
whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,  
whatever is commendable, if there is any  
excellence, if there is anything worthy of  
praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> What you  
have learned<sup>[b]</sup> and received and heard and  
seen in me—practice these things, and the  
God of peace will be with you.

<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at  
length you have revived your concern for  
me. You were indeed concerned for me,  
but you had no opportunity. <sup>11</sup> Not that I am  
speaking of being in need, for I have  
learned in whatever situation I am to be

Intro Question

Why shouldn't we worry? Look around at the current troubles, political, ideological, financial, social and see why we should worry. Yet, is that the approach that God would have Paul's example teach us?

Background

Greg starts out by telling us that this same passage from the fruit of the Spirit verses in Galatians 5 (our current sermon series) is the same passage on which he preached his first sermon at All Saints fifteen years ago. He still struggles with that idea of finding contentment in Christ today. To understand, just consider the introductory question and then add your own personal trials that come from simply living. Greg follows Paul's instruction that if you worry, then pray, and you will know God speaks. Greg worries, then prays, and then goes back to worrying. He stated that he has this instinct to worry because it feels like the “responsible” thing to do. He enjoys it. If one isn't worrying, then that person isn't being serious and not paying attention. But according to the scriptures, if we don't wait on the Lord, then something is missing. C.S. Lewis describes it as like standing next to a waterfall that has no sound. Something isn't there that should be. So, turn to and wait upon God. Paul did not mean to portray himself as a “Stoic for God” after the then popular Greek philosophy of putting up with things by withdrawing into oneself and our own resources. To wait upon God means just that.

Paul had troubles that would humble anyone: beaten, imprisoned (twice), stoned, shipwrecked (three times), at times without food or clothing, and – crucial to him – continually concerned for those he loved. In Paul's case these were the people in the churches he had founded.

In our bulletin, the fruits of the Spirit are laid out along with their counterfeits. For both peace and patience, the counterfeit idea is apathy and cynicism. Caring less or with disdain will not bring contentment, nor bring fewer concerns about those things which face us. The letters of Paul don't say that less worry or reaching a certain spiritual level will lead to contentment.

Discuss:

1. Compared to the “worry, pray, then go back to worrying” mode, Paul approached life differently in his understanding of peace and patience – and what comes from them. Paul learned to be content with what God had provided to him. That doesn't just mean that he had learned to be a good steward of God's gifts. By itself, that is a great lesson to ponder over and learn from. It wasn't that Paul did not struggle. He did. Paul's images from his letters were difficult activities: running the race, fighting the fight, pressing forward for the prize, and dealing daily with his “thorn in

content. <sup>12</sup>I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

GOSPEL READING

**John 14:27-31**

<sup>27</sup>Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. <sup>28</sup>You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup>And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. <sup>30</sup>I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, <sup>31</sup>but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

the flesh," possibly a continual physical ailment that stayed with him. His patience was tested daily.

At the beginning of Philippians, Paul speaks of finding contentment first in his understanding of the gospel, his understanding of the truth. In prison, he knew why he was there. "I am in chains for the gospel." His understanding of that truth made him more able to be content while he was in prison – not that being in prison was OK. God was bigger than Paul's issues. There are beliefs and truths worth dying for – and, therefore, worth living for. Paul was content because he knew he was "in chains" for Christ. Paul wasn't happy about being in prison. However, due to his faith, he found joy in the "bad" circumstances that led to good for God. He rejoiced that God brings good things from seemingly bad situations. In the case of Paul's imprisonment, many more were encouraged to speak courageously of the gospel because Paul was restrained. That, for Paul, was occasion for joy. Greg also asked a modern version of the question when he posed a query about Billy Graham. When Rev. Graham was allowed to speak in Moscow in 1971, would he have been more pleased to speak as one man or to have thousands of Russians speak continually about Jesus and the gospel?

2. Notwithstanding this increase in the spreading of the word, Paul's true contentment came from Christ. He understood that the only way to learn how to rely on Christ while going through difficult circumstances, of which Paul had many, is to rely on Christ while going through difficult circumstances. Reading about it will not really teach it. It is learned by doing. In 2 Cor 12, Paul wrote "Christ said to me, 'my grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness.' Paul then said he would boast in his weaknesses and delight in persecutions, insults and hardships because "when I am weak, then I am strong." Greg used the example of H.G. Spafford who lost his house in Chicago and most of the family's possessions in a fire. Shortly thereafter, his wife survived a ship sinking in the Atlantic that took all four of their children. Later, sailing through the same place, Spafford wrote "It is Well With My Soul," a beautiful hymn that has the lines "When peace like a river attendeth my way/When sorrows like sea billows roll/Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say/It is well, it is well, with my soul."

**Conclusion/Application**

Some questions:

1. What me worry? Is it wrong to worry? What is God's teaching about worrying? Does he say it is unnatural?
2. How do I personally worry? Do I see it as a discipline? Is there some kind of exception available to me and the current times that means I can worry and look to my own resources instead of to God? Is it "well with my soul" in times of stress?
3. What role do I truly designate to praying in times of stress, negatives, setbacks or worry? What can I learn from Paul?

**Prayer** Lord, teach me what it means to wait upon you, for whom a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. Hold me and guide me to your truth, I pray. Amen.

By David Turpin