

Peace in Troubled Times – *Philippians 4:4-7*

Sermon by Associate Pastor Joe Davis

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I. INTRODUCTION: THESE ARE TROUBLED TIMES

As we look around the world today we realize that these are troubled times we live in, wouldn't you say? Well today, I want to take you back in time 55 years to the year 1960 in a place not too far away called Longview, Washington. I'm going to share with you a valedictorian speech that was given by my mother, Lois Anne Nordstrom, when she graduated in 1960 from R.A. Long Public High School in Longview, Washington. The speech is titled, "In These Troubled Times." I share it with you today to prepare us for our message today which I've called, "Peace in Troubled Times."

So imagine yourself back in 1960 attending a public high school graduation, and here we go:

"These are troubled times. All one has to do is survey the world situation to see that this is true. So many nations are on the brink of war. So many revolutions are taking place among countries of the world today. These are indeed troubled times. Yet, we may have this confidence: There is a God who still controls the universe and the hearts and minds of men. He will give spiritual strength and courage to all who put their trust in Him.

Our country was founded by God-fearing men – men who had the courage to leave country, home, and earthly goods and come to a strange land where they could stand firm on their convictions to worship and serve God according to their own personal beliefs. The government of our country was organized and carried out on the godly principles set forth by our forefathers.

George Washington once said, 'It is impossible to govern the world without the Bible.' I believe that our country has been prosperous and has become great because it was founded on these principles. 'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord...' Psalm 33:12. But is our nation still looking to God? How many of us attend church regularly? How many of us read our Bibles? How many pray? How can we expect God to continue to bless our country if we no longer put our trust in Him? Many years ago Daniel Webster said, 'If we abide by the principles taught

in the Bible our country will go on prospering and continue to prosper, but if we in our prosperity neglect its instructions and authority no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury our glory in profound obscurity.'

We seniors stand on the threshold of the future. What will we make of ourselves? When we come to the end of our lives on this earth, will we be able to look back and see that we have contributed something that is worthwhile – something that people will remember and benefit by after we are gone? Or will we have to look back and regretfully admit that we did not do much for our country, for our families, or for our friends that was worth remembering? Theodore Roosevelt said, 'If we read the Bible aright, we read a book which teaches us to go forth and do the work of the Lord; to do the work of the Lord in the world as we find it; to try to make things better in the world, even if only a little better, because we have lived in it.' Roosevelt goes on to say, 'I enter a most earnest plea that in our hurried and rather bustling life of today we do not lose the hold our forefathers had on the Bible.'

In the America of today, too much stress is being placed on material wealth and gain. A man's success is being placed on how much money he has in the bank, how modern a home and how many cars he can afford. We seem to be losing sight of the true values of life, and the high ideals and purposes which are the key to real success.

Even with these high ideals, development of character and personal drive, however, there will always be something lacking if we depend entirely on ourselves for success. We must have spiritual strength if we are to be really great. We must put our faith and trust in God and His Son and look to Him for help and guidance to face each day in these troubled times with courage and with peaceful hearts. We must read our Bibles. We must pray. It is our responsibility to keep alive the faith of our forefathers."

Well, as we consider how our world has changed since my mom gave this speech in 1960, I don't think we would say our country has followed her advice. America has been drifting further and further away from the principles of the Bible and we can see the results all around us. And clearly the world as a whole is still facing very troubled times, just as it was when my mom was giving her valedictorian speech.

And today I would say the troubled times around the world are even more intense than in 1960. Just this weekend we saw Islamic extremists attack a luxury

hotel in Mali, killing 27. Last weekend we saw the senseless killings that occurred in Paris... Families ripped apart and people's lives snuffed out who were simply out for a night of entertainment... We saw a group of people full of anger who believe their God is telling them to murder other people and that in so doing they will be ushered into heaven... And beyond Paris in the past year we've seen many people who claim the name of Christ being singled out and persecuted and killed simply because they've chosen to believe in and follow Jesus Christ... And right here in America we've seen an organized attack on the biblical values that this country was founded on and experienced vicious words directed at anyone who believes that the Bible is actually true and the very written word of God.

And beyond these things going on in the world as a whole, each of us is facing a constant spiritual attack that is intended by Satan to divide us, to shake our faith, and to keep us distracted from being true disciples of Christ who allow him to guide and direct every aspect of our lives, building us up in the love and power and true life change that only he can offer. Satan is constantly trying to fill us with fear, to keep us troubled with constant worries and conflict in our lives, and to turn believers against each other. He's working to create bitterness and unforgiveness in the hearts of believers, thereby hindering their communication with God and their effectiveness in him. These are truly troubled times around the world and in each of our daily lives.

So how can we walk confidently in the midst of all the troubles and challenges and attacks that are coming against us every day? How can we have peace in the midst of the most challenging times? How can we keep in close fellowship with Christ and not allow the distractions and worries and challenges of the world to get us off track and keep us from walking worthy? How can we continue to find joy and be thankful no matter what we face in our lives from day-to-day? These are the questions I'd like to turn our attention to today.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 4. We're going to be studying today a passage today that is probably a favorite for many of you out there and one that you turn to again and again to find comfort and remind yourself to not let worry and stress take over your life. Today we're going to be studying Philippians chapter 4, verses 4 through 7. Let's read the passage as we begin:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 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.

What a beautiful passage this is, packed with so many truths that are completely applicable to each of us in our day-to-day lives. Here in these 4 verses we find what we need to walk successfully in these troubled times.

II. REJOICE IN THE LORD

As we begin to dive into this passage, we first of all see Paul calling each of us to rejoice. In fact he commands us to rejoice and he does it twice in one sentence. Clearly Paul wants us to realize that rejoicing is important and something that is essential to our daily walk with the Lord.

So what does it mean to rejoice? What do you think of when someone tells you to rejoice? Do you sometimes think to yourself, "Yeah whatever, sounds like something I'm supposed to do, but let's get real, how can I rejoice when things are going terribly?" I think we sometimes also get the idea that to rejoice is to paste on a false smile or act like everything's going great even when it's not. We may picture the way people sometimes act at church, putting on a happy face and acting like everything's just going perfectly while in reality their life is falling apart and tearing at the seams.

Well let me tell you, that is not what Paul is calling us to here in Philippians. The word translated, "rejoice," means to find your joy, delight and gladness in something. It also can mean to be well or to thrive.

Paul is not calling us here to paste on a false smile and act like things are just perfect when they're not. Instead he's calling us to find our joy and delight and gladness, in the midst of even the most difficult of times, in the only one who can bring us true joy and fulfillment and peace in life. Notice that we are to rejoice in the Lord.

Where are you finding your joy and fulfillment and strength and sustenance and meaning in life? Are you finding it in your hobbies, or in a daily latte from Starbucks, or in shopping, or in comfort food, or maybe in getting ahead at work, or in building your riches and your own personal kingdom? Where do you go and what do you do when life gets hard? Those are the places where you're may be finding your joy right now. And what we need to realize today and every day is that nothing other than drawing near to God has the ability to provide us with the lasting joy and peace and fulfillment that can see us through the hardest of times and allow us to be joyful and have hope and avoid depression through the darkest of times in our lives. Only in our close fellowship with him can we truly be well and thrive in the midst of the daily attacks and challenges and pain that confront us constantly.

And notice in verse four that we are to rejoice in the Lord always. More and more as we grow in our faith and relationship with Christ, we will be finding our joy and our strength by maintaining a constant close and intimate relationship with God, where we share our lives and worries and concerns with him, and pour out our thankfulness for all the ways that he takes care of us and blesses us and provides the power and strength we need to face life.

When we're young in our faith, we tend to just run to the Lord when things are rough and we become desperately aware of our need for him. But as we grow in our faith we realize that we need him just as much in the good times of life as we do in the hard and challenging times. We learn to find our joy in our delight in him always and not just when things are going badly.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

III. LET YOUR REASONABLENESS BE KNOWN TO ALL

The next command Paul gives us in this Philippians passage is:

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

Can you think of some unreasonable people in your life? People who are so full of anger and bitterness that they can't be reasoned with and they can't see things logically and in a fair manner.

When people are in unreasonable mode, there's no resolving problems... There's only a prideful insistence that I'm right and you're wrong and I'm not going to give any credibility to anything you say... In fact I'm not even going to truly listen to and consider what you have to say... I've already made my decision and have decided that you're wrong and nothing you can do can change my mind. This is the type of attitude that characterizes unreasonable people. Humility and logic is out the window and problems can't be resolved until the unreasonableness fades away and the spirit of love and humility and reconciliation arises.

And being an unreasonable person is unbecoming to a follower of Christ. Paul tells us here in Philippians that reasonableness should practically ooze out of us and be visible to everyone we come into contact with. We should be known as people who are fair and equitable and gentle and humble and willing to work for reconciliation and forgiveness and healthy relationships among brothers at all costs.

Can you think of times in your life when you been unreasonable? Usually we become unreasonable when we've feel we've been hurt and we allow that hurt to create bitterness and defensiveness and anger inside of us. And what we need to recognize is that that is exactly what Satan wants to happen. In fact he's always working to create bitterness and anger and division among us.

You may have heard of the book called, "The Bait of Satan." The premise of that book is the Satan is always working to cause people to get offended with each other and allow that offense to create division and bitterness among brothers. And when we take the bait and allow that to happen in our hearts, we become unreasonable people who refuse to grant the forgiveness to others that we ourselves have received from God himself. We become like the man in the parable who himself was forgiven an astronomical debt and then went to another person who owed him a small debt and refused to forgive it, even taking it to the point of throwing that person in jail for the small debt he owed.

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

Let's not take the bait of Satan. Let's be reasonable in all things and be known by all the people we come into contact with as gentle and loving people who are willing to grant forgiveness and work for reconciliation even in the face of repeated failures and mistakes and misunderstandings.

IV. THE LORD IS NEAR; DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT ANYTHING

As we look at Paul's next instructions to us in this Philippians passage, we see a very significant truth that we need to grasp and be aware of at all times if we're to follow his next command. Now we're all very familiar with Paul's next command in this passage and in fact for those of us who have memorized this passage, we probably memorized verses 6 and 7 only. Paul's command is found at the beginning of verse 6 and it says:

Do not be anxious about anything.

And this is a truth that we would each love to make a living reality in our lives, wouldn't we? How much time do each of us waste in our daily lives being anxious and worried? This word translated, "anxious," means to be troubled with cares or to have a distracting care.

I think we've all been there, haven't we? You see every day we each face opportunities to be worried or troubled about things, because every day we have challenges and conflicts and difficulties that we have to deal with... And many of them are extremely hard to figure out how to deal with in a godly manner.

And in each of these situations we have a choice to make: we can allow ourselves to become preoccupied and distracted and troubled about the problems, or we can spend our time submitting these problems to God and asking for his wisdom and peace and guidance to be able to deal with them and resolve them in a godly manner. And you know which path Satan wants us to take: he wants us distracted with the worries and cares of life. He wants us troubled and upset. The last thing he wants is for us to calmly hand the problem over to God and ask for his wisdom and direction and resolution.

Let's face it, we will all experience the emotion of worry in our lives, but key to handling it in a godly manner is the drawing near to God, as opposed to trying to handle it on our own and letting it become something that troubles us and sends us into an emotional tailspin.

What Paul is directing us to do here is to not allow ourselves to become troubled and depressed and stressed out by our problems and challenges in life, but instead to spend our energies on seeking God and his wisdom rather than stewing about and wallowing in and ranting and raving about them. That doesn't mean we can't put thought into how to resolve the issues, but it means that the issues need not send us into turmoil and despair and distraction from our continuous fellowship with God. The issues should be met with a drawing near to God and the handing over of the stress and worry to him.

And I want you to notice now the key phrase that precedes verse 6, and that usually doesn't get memorized with verses 6 and 7:

The Lord is at hand.

This is why we don't need to be anxious about anything. The Lord is near. He's with us right now in fact and in everything we're going through. He's waiting for us to turn our eyes to him, to remember that he's there and wants to give us his wisdom and power and peace as we seek him and talk to him and share the moments of our daily existence with him.

So the next time you find yourself worrying or being troubled, tell yourself, "The Lord is near." Tell it to other people when they're stressed out and worried and troubled: "The Lord is near. Talk to him. Rest in his presence. Ask him for the wisdom he promises to give you when you ask."

We waste so much time and energy trying to figure things out on our own and trying to resolve our problems without consulting and relying on the Lord who is so near and so present with us and so willing to provide us with what we need to walk confidently through life with peace and joy in him. The Lord is at hand. Acknowledge him, seek him and share your life with him.

V. LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN TO GOD

As we continue on in Philippians chapter 4, now in 2nd half of verse 6, we see the alternative we have to being anxious. We see how we are called to spend our time in a much more productive way than just worrying and stressing out and allowing ourselves to be troubled and overwhelmed with our problems. Paul tells us:

... but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

When we feel anxious and overwhelmed by the problems of life, the remedy is to get on our knees and spend the energy we would've expended on worry and stress on seeking God's wisdom and presence and power. Let your requests be made known to God. Yes, he already knows our problems, but he still calls us to willingly share them with him and in so doing acknowledge our desperate need for him and our dependence on him in all things.

The natural human tendency is to try to figure out our problems by our own mental strength and wisdom...a strength and wisdom that is extremely limited and blind-sighted by our very limited view of the universe. But God's way is that we function as he designed us to live from the very beginning, and that is in complete dependence on him and in the close fellowship with him that he made possible through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross... A way of life that is so beautifully expressed in the three words: pray without ceasing.

So the next time you feel anxious and worried and troubled, let that remind you to turn to God instead of to your own mental strength. Let that worry remind you that the Lord is near and ready to meet your need. Notice that Paul says, "but in everything by prayer and supplication." This is how our life with God is to be lived... In constant conversation with God and dependence on him... Where we share everything with him and rely on him in all situations, good and bad.

It's so easy for us to think we can handle most of life without God... To just turn to him when things are rough or we feel over our head. We have so many distractions and dreams and things to keep us busy, that we so easily lose contact with God.

But what Paul reminds us here is that our walk with God is to be constant and as important to our health and well-being as breathing is to our continued existence: ***in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.***

Our lives as followers of Christ are to be characterized by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. This is a lifestyle that flows out of the humility God calls each of us to, as Rob Burton so clearly expressed in his message last week. We can be like the world and worry and stress ourselves out and run here and there, or we can draw near to God in humility and walk in the wisdom that is offered to us by the very Creator of the universe who knows all things.

Now the word, “supplication,” is one that we don’t often use in our day-to-day speech. When’s the last time you encouraged someone to supplicate? But in looking at its meaning, we learn that it’s something that arises out of a wanting or a need, and involves a seeking, asking or requesting. So the idea we get is that supplication is something we do when we realize our own inadequacy and our inability to handle the difficulties and challenges of life on our own. Supplication arises when we realize we can’t do it on our own and instead turn to God for the wisdom and strength we need. Supplication results from humility in our hearts. And when we look at the way the word is used in Scripture, it often involves repentance and an acknowledgment of mistakes.

In talking about the future of Israel in Jeremiah 31, verse 9 we see a picture of this lifestyle of prayer and supplication:

With weeping they will come, and by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, on a straight path in which they will not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

In this passage we see an example of the blessings God will bring when we walk in prayer and supplication with humility. Notice that the repentance and the supplication leads to the blessings. And the blessings walking in supplication are significant: 1) He will lead them; 2) He will make them walk by streams of waters; and 3) He will make them walk on a straight path in which they will not stumble.

God is ready and willing to lead us, to guide us to pleasant places, and to keep us on a straight path where we will not stumble and where we won't waste their time meandering here and there and following every rabbit trail that distracts us from our true purpose and mission in life. He just calls us to turn to him and hand over our problems to his loving hands and his perfect knowledge that is able to give us what we need to navigate life through even the most difficult challenges.

But as we look back to our Philippians passage, please don't miss that key phrase that goes along with prayer and supplication: ***with thanksgiving.***

How do you feel when you do something nice for someone and there's never a thank you or any kind of acknowledgment of appreciation? I'm sure each of us have been guilty at times of forgetting to say thank you or letting people know how much we appreciate them or something they've done for us. But what I hope we all know is that we're called as believers in Christ to be thankful and to acknowledge those who've made a difference in our lives or who've gone out of their way to do nice things for us. There's just something innately upsetting when people have an entitlement mentality and don't know how to say the simple words, "thank you."

And what we need to remember as well in our relationship with God is that we need to give him thanks for his wisdom and strength and power and for the miracles he accomplishes in our lives on a daily basis. It's so easy sometimes when a problem is solved by God to just move on and forget to spend time praising him and thanking him for what he has accomplished. And even when there's not some huge, impressive miracle he's performed, we need to remember that even the fact that each of us is standing upright and walking and breathing today is a precious gift from God.

This is Thanksgiving week, isn't it? This is a time when we try to focus on thankfulness and gratefulness for the blessings we've received in our lives. But let's let this year be a time as well when we grow in a gratefulness to God that goes way beyond Thanksgiving day. As we share our daily lives with God in prayer and as we present our requests to him in supplication and as we turn over our worries and cares to him, let's also remember to spend lots of time thanking him for his presence and wisdom and all that he daily accomplishes on our behalf. It's so easy and natural for us when we pray to spend all our time complaining to him

and asking him for things, but let's challenge ourselves to spend more and more time just praising him and thanking him and celebrating his deep and personal love for us.

...in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

VI. THE PEACE OF GOD WILL GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS

So as we get to the close of our Philippians passage today, we find out what the beautiful result will be of a life lived by finding our joy in the Lord always, letting our lives be characterized by reasonableness, being aware of God's constant nearness to us, and instead of being anxious and troubled, letting our requests be made known to God with an attitude of gratefulness. Paul tells us the result of this lifestyle in verse 7 of chapter 4:

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Here we find the beautiful alternative God offers to a life of stress and worry and depression. He offers us peace. And not just an ordinary, passing, fleeting peace...but a peace which surpasses all understanding. This is a peace that can endure even in the midst of the hardest times in our lives and the most difficult things we will ever face. It's a peace that won't make sense to those who don't know Christ and who are living their lives by their own human wisdom and with eyes fixed on temporal things.

The meaning of the Greek word translated, "peace," here describes a sense of rest and contentment. The corresponding Hebrew word is *shalom*, which signifies wholeness. In these troubled times, in this broken world, in the middle of broken relationships and heartbreak and pain and persecution and false accusations, we can have the peace of God. We can remain whole and continue to experience enduring rest and contentment as we rely on God's strong presence with us and hand over our problems and challenges to Him.

We remember some of the last words of Jesus that he left with his disciples before his crucifixion in John 14:27:

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

Only God knows what the future holds for each of us. Only God knows what will happen in our personal lives in the coming days and weeks and years. Only God knows the timeline of wars and persecutions and the ushering in of his kingdom. But what we can know is that we can have the enduring peace of God as we delight ourselves in him, seek him, and moment-by-moment turn over our problems and challenges to him.

I want to close today by sharing with you a few verses from Psalm 37 that the Lord gave to me after some disappointment I faced recently and as I battled my fleshly urge to take the bait of Satan and allow the disappointment to create bitterness and resentment within me. Interestingly enough, God gave this passage to me a few days prior to the disappointment and he gave it to me as I was reading a public school literature textbook from the 1800's that is full of Scripture passages and writings from famous authors throughout history most of whom acknowledged the existence and importance of the God of the Bible in their writings.

I share these verses from Psalm 37 with you today, because they contain essential truths that we need to hold onto and live out no matter what happens to us in our day to day lives, and no matter how difficult or unfair life becomes. We're going to read verses 3 through 9. Here David is writing in the midst of extremely difficult challenges in his life and in the face of really evil and unfair things happening all around him. These are the instructions he gives to himself and us as we walk through troubled times:

Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

Trust in the Lord. Do good. Be faithful. Continue to delight yourself in the Lord no matter your circumstances. He will give you himself if he is your desire. What better gift could he give us? Commit your way to him and he will act. He will work out justice in his own timing and he will bring the truth to light at the proper time. Be still and wait patiently for him. Don't worry and be anxious and try to bring about your own justice. That will only result in more evil. Refrain from anger and forsake wrath!

This my friends is how God is calling us to live our lives...And it's the only road to peace in these troubled times...It's the only way we can guard our heart and our minds through the most difficult of circumstances and injustices and keep ourselves from walking in the way of the world with hard hearts, bitterness and resentment. Find your delight and your joy and your peace in the Lord and in him alone. No matter what happens, continue to delight yourself in the Lord. That is the only way to have peace in troubled times.