**Philippians 4:4:7** – Joy Happens: Game Plan for Enduring the Race

Intro: On June 24, 1994 Walt Disney Pictures released the now famous movie The Lion King. In the movie there are two characters; Timon and Pumbaa. This is the animated meerkat and warthog duo that took a common East African Swahili saying “hakuna matata” and made it famous all over the world. “Hakuna Matata, what a wonderful pharse, it means no worries for the rest of our days, it’s a problem free philosophy, hakuna matata.” Wow, wouldn’t life be great if that were true, “no worries for the rest of our days…are you kidding me.

As great as that sounds we all know that we live in a world where we are constantly bumping into real life consequences of a creation that is broken and affected by sin. Life is challenging and no matter what season of life you are in we all face complex situations that often leave us feeling anxious and worn out physically, emotionally and mentally. And yet as believers we know that God’s word says in Rom. 8:37 *“that in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loves us.”* So why then do so many of us struggle with anxiety and is there anything we can do moving forward to change our experience as followers of Christ? And the answer is a resounding YES! The apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians gave some practical steps that **if applied** would help them and can help us lessen our anxiety and enjoy a more peaceful journey in Christ.

Context: Paul wrote to his brothers and sisters in Philippi about this exact issue and his personal experiences qualified him to give advice on this topic. In spite of his imprisonment, we have seen each week through the different sections of his letter that the dominant tone of his letter in spite of his circumstances is joyful. And he longed for his brothers and sisters in Philippi to experience the same joy he was experiencing in the Lord, in spite of the difficult and uncertain situation he found himself in. See, at the time Paul was writing his letter from prison, the Philippians found themselves facing increasing opposition from their unbelieving neighbors. In fact they were enduring the same kind of suffering they had witnessed Paul and Silas experience on one of Paul’s previous missionary journeys to Philippi when the two preachers were illegally beaten and imprisoned accused of being a threat to Roman customs (Acts 16:19-24, Phil. 1:28-30). So understanding what they were going through Paul begins to wrap up his letter by placing as much emphasis as possible on 4 exhortations (an address emphatically urging someone to do something) with the hope they will pay close attention to them because in them is the gameplan to living with less anxiety and enjoying a more peaceful journey in Christ.

Text: Phil. 4:4-7

1. Rejoice v.4

- throughout Paul’s letter joy keeps popping up as a main theme

(1:4,18,25,26; 2:2,16-18,28; 3:1,3;4:1,4,10)

- *“in the Lord”* the source in which the believer’s joy exists is Christ. Too often we experience anxiety in the race because we have made something or someone other than our relationship with Christ the source of our joy. And because nothing in this life is the same yesterday, today and forever other than our savior Jesus Christ we find ourselves anxious when things around us change. Things that we have relied on to give us joy (possessions, relationships, health, our vocation…). The difference between the happiness we often settle for and the joy Paul is experiencing and exhorting the Philippian believers to pursue is that it is not dependent on the circumstances of life rather it is related to our *“unchanging relationship with the sovereign Lord.”* It is joy that is independent of all things on earth because it has its source in the continual presence of Christ. It comes from realizing “whose we are and all that we have received because of that relationship” We belong to Christ and as a result; *we are forgiven, we are reconciled with God, we are saved, we will never be alone and will always be taken care of.* Hallelujah what a savior this is where our joy has to come from that fact that we are united with Christ.

-New City Catechism: What is our only hope in life and death? That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death to God and to our savior Jesus Christ. When we grasp this good news in our minds (that’s where it has to start, *“be transformed by the renewing of your minds”*) and then embrace that truth with our hearts to the point where it is more precious than anything or anyone it will by the power of His spirit transform our attitude and actions to be like Paul who even though he was in the midst of suffering was experiencing joy in the Lord.

Application: Who or what do you rejoice in? Because that will significantly impact whether we live with lessoning anxiety and enjoy a more peaceful journey in Christ.

2. Let you gentleness by evident to all vs5

-despite of their persecution Paul is reminding them of the importance to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel (1:28-30)

-he encourages them to not only maintain an attitude of joy “in the Lord” but instructs them that out of this deep contentment that comes from being “in the Lord” should come an attitude coupled with actions of generosity towards others when the normal or expected response is retaliation. Does that not sound similar to how God has acted towards us, He has extended His grace (undeserved favor) towards us Ephesians 2:1-

-he is urging them to adopt the example set by Christ of gentleness and non-retaliation toward their persecutors; 1 Peter 2:23 *“when they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”* Rom. 12:19, Psalm 46:1

-and just like Christ believers *“gentleness”* should be evident to all eg. Reformation martyrs.

-How is this possible? *“The Lord is near”* – through the person of the Holy Spirit all believers are indwelt and encompassed by the presence of God, 1 Cor. 3:16, Psalm 139:7. His presence living in us empowers us to not only stand firm in the midst of difficult and uncertain times but Holy Spirit also gives us the strength to display the right attitude and conduct the Gospel requires of all believers.

Application: Who or what have you entrusted yourself to? Because that will significantly impact whether you live with lessoning anxiety and enjoy a more peaceful journey in Christ.

3. Do not be anxious…*about anything*

-on its own this exhortation would seem to lack empathy and seem unrealistic. To not be anxious about anything seems unachievable or at best only possible for “super spiritual’ people to do. --that is why context is so important. Paul has just established that the believer’s joy is to be rooted in the fact that we are “in the Lord” and all that accompanies that relationship including his forever presence and power give every believer hope that we can all actually experience a life with lessoning anxiety and enjoy a more peaceful journey in Christ.

- Although Paul’s challenge to them to not be anxious was related to the persecution they were suffering the intended application is not only limited to their situation. There are many different circumstances represented amongst us this morning that are potentially dampening our joy and quite possibly even triggering attitudes and actions in us that don’t line up with our heavenly citizenship.

-what I am learning in my race to win the prize is that when I am anxious it *“indicates to God, my wife, my children and others around me a lack of trust in God’s wisdom, sovereignty and power.”* That is why it is so essential to settle in our hearts and minds, *“what our only hope is in life and death”* and daily learn to rejoice in that and meditating daily on His Word to remind ourselves of the truth is a great antidote for battling anxiety.

-*“do not be anxious about anything”* all situations we find ourselves in both the good and difficult are within God’s purposes and his love for us, his care for us and his strength to carry us through never changes, *“the Lord is near!”* Matt. 6:25-27.

Application: Who or what do you turn to for the truth? Because that will significantly impact whether you live with lessoning anxiety and enjoy a more peaceful journey in Christ.

4. Present your requests to God

-through prayers and petitions ***with thanksgiving***, there will be times when our situation seems too overwhelming that it feels almost impossible to approach God in prayer with thanksgiving. But if we will daily put into practice the words of Paul in Colossians 3:1 where he says, *“since, then we have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things”* then I believe we will come to understand in the midst of difficult and uncertain circumstances that we have so much to be thankful for. *“It is only when we are fully convinced that God is working all things together for good that we can really feel the perfect gratitude towards him which believing prayer demands.”*

- when we pray we must always remember three things;

 *The love of God – which only ever desires what is best for us*

 *The wisdom of God – which alone knows what is best for us*

 *The power of God – which alone can bring about that which is best for us.*

-Paul encourages the believers in Phillipi to replace their anxiety with thankful prayer.

-prayer is one of the great privileges we have because we are united with Christ. In Christ we have a great high priest who not only fully understands what we are going through but has also made a way for us access to the very throne of grace; Hebrews 4:14-16

-so in every situation when you sense anxiety taking control of our hearts and minds; present your requests to God by prayer and petition *“making a meek and humble earnest plea with thanksgiving for a specific need for something significant requested of God. Something that you or another cannot get or accomplish without God’s help.”* Rather than carry the emotional and mental weight of anxiety we need to learn to *“cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”*

-then vs. 7; the *“and”* at the beginning of vs. 7 is more important than it looks because it does not simply add another statement to vs. 4-6 but actually gives the RESULT of *“presenting our requests to God by prayer and petition with thanksgiving.”*

-if the Philippians would follow Paul’s advice in the midst of their persecution and rejoice in the Lord, remember the Lord is near and rather than be anxious about their situation present their requests to God with thanksgiving they would experience what he is experiencing from his prison cell – *“the peace of God, which transcends all understanding…* an overwhelming sense of inner contentment grounded in an *“unwavering confidence that God is able and willing to do what is best for his children.* A peace that *“transcends all understanding”…”so precious that the human mind, with all its skill and all its knowledge, can never produce it, that’s why it is call the peace of God.*

*-* So wonderful is the peace of God that it empowers and enables believers to break the normal anxiety and behavior expected from people in the midst of difficult and uncertain circumstances.

-why vs.7b because it *“guards our heats and our minds in Christ Jesus.”* In light of the persecution his brothers and sisters were facing Paul uses the word *“guard”* a military term to depict God’s peace as a sentinel (soldier whose job is to stand and keep watch) guarding a city to protect it from attack and in a garrison town like Philippi this would have very relevant meaning. Take comfort in the fact that God’s peace which transcends all understanding will stand like a garrison over our hearts and minds with his peace.

Application – How are we praying through every situation? Because that will significantly impact whether you live with lessoning anxiety and enjoy a more peaceful journey in Christ.

Those who experience Christ in such a way as Paul did are those who display his virtues;

* Showing consideration for others and living a life of prayer rather than anxiety.

Paul was a man whose mind had been renewed and transformed by Christ and whose life exhibited the virtues of one who was in Christ. He longed for his fellow believers in Philipi to experience a life with lessoning anxiety and enjoy a more peaceful journey in Christ and that is what I long for as well.

Although Timon and Pumba introduced the world to the concept of living life with “hakuna matata” it would only leave people disappointed because it was based on a “problem free philosophy.” But as believers we can truly experience *“peace that transcends all understanding” because what we have is not simply some philosophy that we intellectually embrace but rather we have a personal union with the all-powerful, all-knowing creator and sustainer of the universe who has revealed in his word that “he will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in him. So brothers and sisters Trust in the Lord , the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal Isaiah 26:3-4.*