

Heavenly King, Earthly Crisis #1: King of Peace (Philippians 4:4-9)

INTRODUCTION [make sure recordings are going]

PRAY

I was thinking this week about what I'm going to miss most during a quarantine
I am naturally an introvert and a homebody, so there's a lot I don't particularly mind
But there are certainly things I am going to miss
 We had to cancel a family birthday party that was supposed to happen yesterday
 My ultimate frisbee league suspended play indefinitely this last week
 That's one of my favourite hobbies—not to mention great exercise
 I'm going to miss sports in general... especially baseball
 Which feels like an indispensable part of every spring for me
 I don't know what I'm going to do with myself without baseball
But, I know what I will miss more than any of those things, by far: being with my church family
I mean, I can be gone for a couple weeks on holidays, and survive that
But this unnatural, forced separation that we are in now is going to get old really fast
 And I'm going to really miss seeing your faces and hearing your voices
And while we can thank God for technology that allows us some measure of worship—
 diminished or artificial as it may be—I hope it only whets your appetite
And I actually hope we worship during these weeks longing for more
 That this time of separation only increases our desire to worship together
 And increases our appreciation and joy when we do eventually gather in person

This gives me a bit of appreciation for how the apostle Paul often felt towards his readers
 As a missionary and church planter, he'd often go somewhere, plant a church, grow to
 love its people, and then have to get up and move on to another city in need of a church
 So he was constantly separated from many people he'd led to the Lord, loved, and pastored
And his longings to be reunited often seep out... For example, in Philippians 4:1: **READ v.1**
 So he loved these people, and says so twice in one verse, calling them his beloved
 And he longed to see them again, be with them, and worship with them
This is my prayer for you as we are artificially separated for a season: **READ v.1**
 May we love each other and long to be with each other
 And may we—may you—stand firm in the Lord as we face these uncertain times

But how can we stand firm—steadfast and unshaken—when our world is so shaken up?
I think God's Word has a lot of wisdom for us, being largely written in distressing times
Such was the case for the book of Philippians which I just read from
 As far as we know, life in Philippi wasn't too bad at the moment
 But Paul was writing them while he was chained up in prison
 And he knew that hard times were also inevitably coming for them
 They needed to have a steady faith that was ready to face an unsteady future
I invite you to **TURN** with me to Philippians chapter 4 right now
 I hope you have a bible with you in your homes today...
 If not, you can easily look Philippians 4 up on biblegateway.com
 Or use the YouVersion or ESV Bible app on your phone
I had other plans for what to preach on today...

But what we're going through as a society—as a world—is so big and all-consuming right now
That I think we need God's Word to shed light into our current circumstances
So I thought: What should we consider as Christians in an ongoing pandemic?
What should we look at in times of anxiety, upheaval, and crisis?
There are many things, but the best answer to these questions is God himself
In the middle of earthly crises, we need to be reminded of our heavenly King
In the midst of turbulence, we need to see that Jesus still sits on a throne
Directing our steps, providentially working, and guiding history
So for however many weeks this quarantine goes on for, we want to turn our eyes to Jesus
And see him reigning as King over everything that's going on in our lives

Throughout Philippians, Paul urged believers to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ
So what Jesus has done for us in the past should dramatically impact us now
And the climax of the book focuses on heaven
Essentially saying, 'a life transformed by Jesus will be increasingly transfixed on Jesus'
Consider what he says in chapter 3: **READ 3:12-14, 3:20-21**

And it's here that he challenges them: **READ v.1**

The verses I'm going to focus in on today, v.4-9, are very familiar to many of us
But I think they crucially and beautifully speak to how we can stand firm in the Lord
And a clear theme of these verses is the Lord's peace... Peace is the desired result of all this
Like, "If you do these things, **READ v.7, 9b...** Our King is the God of peace

But these are not times of much peace, are they?

I'm not really talking about peace between nations; I'm talking about peace inside of us
The days would've been stressful enough without an untreatable disease going around
With other health challenges, exam season, unemployment or financial hardships,
marriage troubles and family strain, grief, and plenty of mental health challenges
But the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed so many underlying fears we live with
And provoked a number of new fears and anxieties as well
Almost everyone is clearly afraid of death on some level
We're afraid of facing a disease that may become severe for us
We might be in the small percentage that it hits hard
We're worried about germs lurking on any given surface
We're worried about the elderly or vulnerable—maybe parents or grandparents
Afraid they might not make it through this crisis
We worry about the economic ramifications of a long lockdown
We may see our personal stocks or mutual funds plummeting
We're afraid of being alone, and what toll that could take on us
We're worried about being prepared for being quarantined
Will we have enough food, or be able to get more when we need it?
The next few months are so uncertain for us
Unlike Elsa, we're afraid of venturing into the unknown
And apparently, we're deathly afraid of running out of toilet paper

[tr] If you haven't noticed, our anxieties can intensify during a pandemic

I mean, it's palpable... How many have stood in long lines in a grocery store lately,

While everyone is eerily silent, lost inside their own thoughts?
Here's the good news, from God's Word... The good news I believe Philippians 4 will tell us
There is a supernatural peace from the Lord that can fill our lives...

God's peace can stabilize our hearts and minds in anxious times (v.6-7)

[r] Hear this: God's peace can stabilize our hearts and minds in anxious times

David Platt's definition of anxiety is "[Anxiety =] *Carrying concerns in this world in such a way that we lose perspective on life and/or lack trust in God*"... Plenty of that to go around
Paul assumes here in Philippians that there will be things that make us anxious

And that there are things that will attack our hearts and minds: **READ v.6-7**

So in response to our anxious times and desperate needs, God gives us something amazing

Notice: he doesn't necessarily give us exactly what we ask for

But he gives us something greater... something of himself: his peace

This peace is far more than just emotional calmness, though that may be part of it

This is the *shalom* of God... a wholeness, or absence of strife, or inner stability

Paul says this peace "surpasses understanding"... There's something unexplainable about it

And if you know Christ, you've likely felt this at times

When everything that's happening around you tells you you should be freaking out

But as you decide to trust God in that moment, or pray to him,

A sense of deep peace floods into your heart and steadies your perspective

The imagery Paul uses of *guarding* our hearts and minds is an interesting one

Because he was likely securely chained directly to a prison guard, 24/7, as he wrote this

In this, Paul saw a picture of how God's peace can guard our hearts 24/7

Not to keep us chained up, but to protect us from all kinds of harm

It's like our King has sent us a personal bodyguard to protect us from threats

Or perhaps in a more apropos picture for today, let's think of protection from disease

The novel coronavirus is such a threat because we have no immunities built up against it

If a number of people had had this virus before,

those people would now be immune to it, and it would spread more slowly

Our bodies can build up natural defenses against diseases

But, we don't tend to build up good natural defenses against anxieties

The more anxieties we face, the more we tend to fear—they build on each other

What we need is a vaccine...

For COVID-19, a potential vaccine could save countless lives

By injecting something into our bodies that protects us from the virus

The peace of God is like the vaccination against anxiety

It's something outside of ourselves injected into our hearts

That then defends us whenever anxiety attacks

[tr] Do you think you can use that stability on days like these? I know I can!

Do you think your family members, or your friends, could use this stability right now?

So how do we procure this peace? How do inject this vaccine into our bloodstreams?

I think this passage reveals several practical ways we can access the peace God offers us

That not only can speak peace into our lives

But can demonstrate a firm faith in Jesus to a frail world right now... So first:
God's peace can stabilize our hearts and minds in anxious times

... as we rejoice in Jesus (v.4)

[r] ...as we rejoice in the Lord, our King, Jesus

Look at the beginning of the paragraph: **READ v.4**... In case you missed it: **READ v.4**

In times of crisis, we can get so caught up in the crisis, this doesn't cross our radar at all

It's easy to rejoice when things are all good... Not so much when things are hard
Paul doesn't say to "Rejoice in the Lord whenever you feel his goodness"

He says to rejoice in the Lord *always*

Question: Does "always" include during pandemics? [] Yeah!

Now, this doesn't mean to pretend that everything is awesome and rosy all the time

We live in a broken world... Things are going to be broken a lot

Neither does Paul mean that we should just drum up happiness whenever we're sad

Even if rejoicing can often lead to happiness, they're not the same thing at all

See, happiness is usually tied directly to our current circumstances

But joy—true joy—transcends our circumstances

True joy, for a Christian, is a deep confidence and delight in God and his promises

Joy chooses to believe in God's goodness in every situation, whether or not you feel it

Whatever else might happen to us, it can't change what Jesus did for us

Christ died for your sin. He took away your guilt and shame. He forgave it all.

And then our King rose from the dead. Death is defeated. He gave you new life.

He sent his Holy Spirit to fill us. You are never truly alone, no matter how alone you are.

He chose you. He made you his own. He loved you. He loves you.

And there is nothing in all of creation—no coronavirus or quarantine or lack of
healthcare or market collapse or societal chaos—that can ever take those away

Like, none of those things can ever change the good news

"This gospel truth of old shall not kneel, shall not faint"!

So rejoice! Not in how you feel right now, but in Jesus and what he has done.

D.A. Carson says: "If we fail to respond with joy and gratitude when we are reminded of [what Jesus has done], it is either because we have not properly grasped the depth of the abyss of our own sinful natures and of the curse from which we have been freed by Jesus or because we have not adequately surveyed the splendor of the heights to which we have been raised... If our joy derives primarily from our circumstances, then when our circumstances change, we will be miserable. Our delight must be in the Lord himself. That is what enables us to live with joy above our circumstances."

And if you *don't* have this joy today, because you don't have Jesus today, let me assure you:

You can. Jesus gave himself up to die for you and your sins too

Without Jesus, you do have good reason to fear death or despair over crises like today's

But once your heart is cleansed and united to his, everything changes

If you want Jesus to save you from sin and judgment and death,

I urge you to put your trust in him today...

This world might have you shaken up... Run to him, and call on his name

If you need help, and you're online, message us now... don't put this off
You may die this week, you never know... Are you ready to meet the Lord?

If you do have Jesus, then what does rejoicing in him look like today?

Can you praise him with your voice, whether by yourself or with others in your home?

Can you express your gratitude to him? Can you rest in his love for you? **READ v.4**

[tr] Continue reading in v.5: **READ v.5a...** I'll explain what this means

But I'll give the point first: **God's peace can stabilize our hearts and minds in anxious times...**

... as we demonstrate reason (v.5)

[r] ...as we demonstrate reason or reasonableness

What does Paul mean by "reasonableness"? And what does this have to do with peace?

Other bible versions translate this as 'gentleness' or 'graciousness'

The best way I could describe it is a level-headed patience in the face of chaos or conflict

And is that virtue ever desperately needed today!

All across the online world—and that's about the only world many of us see at the moment—

unreasonableness is on full display, all the time

Rational debate and reasonable dialogue have gone out the window

Along with kindness, patience, grace, and sometimes plain-old logic

And that was before everyone in the world became infectious disease experts overnight!

Commenting on this verse and our current social context, **Trevin Wax** says: *"The way Christians stand out in a contentious environment is by being a voice of reason, by spreading grace in a culture of judgment. Posture matters as much as principle... Reasonableness radiates outward in a world darkened by constant cycles of outrage."* (And might I add, constant cycles of fear)

So what does this mean for us? As our world displays unreasonableness everywhere,

May we be known for our reasonableness...

Let's respond to people with whom we disagree with grace—not anger or taking offence

Let's be careful to not spread hyperbole or misinformation

(There's a lot out there! So check the sources!)

Let's stand out for our lack of panic... And our lack of self-preservation and hoarding

Let's show a demonstrable trust in God, in what we say or post,

and how we respond to what others say or post

As we do this, God's peace doesn't just flow *to* us, but it can flow *through* us

[tr] How can we actually do this? Because we know what Paul says next is true: **READ v.5b**

[Trevin] Wax comments that *"Whether that means "God is with you" or "Jesus is coming soon," the point is security. You who are beloved by God and empowered by hope in the Saviour's coming—you are free to show grace."*

Look closely though: 'The Lord is at hand' starts a new sentence here—one we already read

READ v.5b-6... So the Lord being at hand should help quell our anxiety

He's near us... He hears our prayers... And one day, he will right all wrongs

This should give us a supernatural stability—a peace in him

And this should drive us to our knees... Because:

God's peace can stabilize our hearts and minds in anxious times...

... as we pray about everything (v.6)

[r] ...as we pray about everything

I sense many Christians take commands to pray this way:

“Pray whenever you’re desperate for help”

Or “Pray whenever you really want something”

Or “Pray for the same things every day—out of habitual repetition”

No wonder we’re so anxious!

Think of how much of life is not covered by such prayers

Instead, we’re told: **READ v.6**

Paul doesn’t just give us a “Don’t worry, be happy”

No, he says “Don’t worry” but then gives us the solution to our worry: prayer

Some of us scoff at this, thinking prayer is a weak kind of response to a crisis—wishful thinking

What can our words do about something so seemingly unstoppable as a pandemic?

Well, our words *are* powerless on their own... We can’t just speak things into existence

But, if our words are heard by an all-powerful God? Not powerless anymore!

Like we just don’t get how amazing prayer is, and how critical prayer is...

You may think, “OK, fine, I can pray... But what else can I *do*?”

Well, on one hand, prayer very well might be the *only* thing you can do

But also: Prayer is the most powerful, most important thing you can do!

When we pray, we come before our Father and our Saviour in heaven

And we beg him to hallow his name, bring his kingdom, do his will, give us what we need, forgive us our sins, and deliver us from evil... which are all super relevant

By the way, you know how we’re supposed to be frequently washing our hands, for 20 seconds

The amount of time it takes to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ twice?

You know what also takes about 20 seconds? Saying the Lord’s Prayer

That would be just as easy, and would be of infinitely more value [_]

Italian pastor Mark Oden explains: *“In the midst of a global crisis, how can we as individuals possibly make a difference? Often we feel so small and insignificant. But there is something we can do. We can call out to our Father in heaven.”*

Just ‘cause you’re alone in your home doesn’t mean you’re alone... The Lord is at hand

And that’s another thing your outer circumstances can’t take away from you:

Christian: you have access to the courts of heaven... We have God’s ear!

So what should we pray for? [Mark] Oden continues with some suggestions: *“Pray for the authorities running our countries and cities. Pray for the medical teams treating the sick. Pray for the men, women, and children who have been infected, for the people afraid to leave their homes, for those at high risk with other illnesses, and for the elderly. Pray the Lord would protect us and keep us. Pray to him, that he might show us his mercy.”*

Back at the beginning of February, when COVID-19 was really contained to only China,

A pastor of a church in Wuhan wrote an open letter to believers worldwide, saying:

“If you do not feel a responsibility to pray, ask the Lord for a loving soul, an earnestly prayerful heart; if you are not crying, ask the Lord for tears. Because we surely know that only through the hope of the Lord’s mercy will Wuhan be saved.” [Anonymous]

And we're way beyond just Wuhan needing the Lord's mercy now... We must pray

READ v.6b... In everything, letting God know our needs, with a heart of gratitude []
There's one way we're going to try to apply this as a church, to make prayer our top priority
(Man, wouldn't that be a great result from this crisis, if it were to drive us to prayer,
and develop in us a deep dependence on God?)
I'm blatantly stealing this idea from another church, but I don't think God minds
For every day while this pandemic is going on, we want to pray together
So at noon every day, we're going to hold a prayer meeting on Facebook Live
I hope you'll take the opportunity to join in, quiet your heart, pray with us,
and to share your prayer requests with us so we can pray with you
So set a reminder, gather your family around, and let's go before our King together

[tr] Continue reading with me: **READ v.8**... There's an entire sermon or more in those words
And I'm not going to go into any kind of satisfying depth here
But notice that the end result of this paragraph too is God's peace: **READ v.9**
Which means v.8 also plays into how we access or enjoy that peace:
So **God's peace can stabilize our hearts and minds in anxious times...**

... as we focus on godly subjects (v.8)

[r] ...as we focus our thoughts on good and godly subjects

READ v.8... This is all about our thought life, and what we are focusing on
And why is this so important in the middle of a pandemic in our day?
Because the negative and fearful and isolated side of this crisis can be all-consuming
There is always new news about the spread of the virus... It is constant
And in our social media world, we have constant access to it
Then, for many of us, if we want to avoid all this for awhile, what do we do?
We pick up the remote for Netflix or a video game controller
Give us a bunch of extra hours at home, and we'll fritter them away on fruitless stuff
Now, I'm *not* saying this is the time to take a social media fast—it's likely not
Or that it's wrong for you to watch some TV or play games during this time

But here's my question: What are we going to pour into our minds over these days?
Because I believe what you put into your mind and dwell on
will largely determine how well you will make it through this season
So is what you're watching, or reading, or constantly seeing *good* for you?
What does your mental diet look like? Would it pass the test of Philippians 4:8?
Is it true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praise-worthy?

I've seen some people say that it's like our culture is getting a forced Sabbath right now
Not true for medical professionals... But for many, this is true...
We're being forced to slow down, stay home, and take some time off
So how might we use this unprecedented opportunity to focus on good things—godly subjects?
Can you start some good habits of spiritual disciplines that you can continue later on?
Can you put down your phone and spend quality time with your family?
Can you pick up a book that you've been meaning to read for awhile?

Or buy a new one? I could give you some recommendations
Can you take an online course of spiritual development of some kind?
Tim Challies posted an opportunity to do this this week... So did Ligonier Ministries
Can you call up a friend every day, not in order to talk about the virus,
but to encourage them with some word from Scripture or a prayer?
How might we redeem the time, because the days are evil—
And at the same time, focus our minds and hearts on what is excellent and praise-worthy?

[tr] Last thing, from Paul's challenge in v.9: **READ v.9**

The believers in Philippi had learned, received, heard, and seen many things from Paul
Now Paul says: put these things into practice, and keep on practicing them
You want to feel the God of peace with you? Then keep following what he says
And here's the point: **God's peace can stabilize our hearts and minds in anxious times...**

... as we carry on faithfully (v.9)

[r] ...as we carry on faithfully

We don't know everything Paul taught or exemplified... We do know some
But God's Word tells us all we need to know about his will
So if we know what God wants from us, then we've got to put it into practice
Don't let this crisis derail your walk with the Lord in any way
As much as you are able, continue to worship him
It might be from your living room... But pray along, sing along, listen intently
As much as you are able, continue to love others
Reach out to those in your small group, ask how they're doing, pray with them
As much as you are able, find ways to serve
Buy groceries, help with tech, watch kids for those who have to keep working
As much as you are able, soak yourself in God's Word and prayer in these days
It's harder to do without full community, but you can still grow right now

Don't be overwhelmed by a long list of things you need to do today
Remember that Jesus has perfectly fulfilled God's law and God's will for us
So that even when we fall short, we are not abandoned or forsaken
If he is your Saviour, you've been given his righteousness and his Spirit
But that truth should empower us to follow him even more—even during an earthly crisis

CONCLUSION

And as we carry on faithfully, notice the result once more: **READ v.9b**
The supernatural peace of God is intimately tied to his presence with us
And he *is* with us... That he has promised us, for all time
And as long as he's with us, he can keep us all standing firm in the Lord, in his peace
As **Isaiah 26:3-4** declares: **"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock."**
That's our King... Trust in him now... Trust in him forever

PRAY

Benediction: Philippians 4:19-20