

Date: March 15, 2020

Text: Philippians 4:6-7

Title: When Panic Strikes

Theme: Fear versus Faith

Proposition: Jesus is the only hope for the world.

Sticky: Our anchor is Jesus

Introduction: We are interrupting our Revelation series because there is a concern on the hearts and minds of people all over the world. There is a virus out there that is literally changing our lives at this time and changing it in unprecedented ways. It's changing what we do and where we go. Never in my lifetime and probably your lifetime have we ever seen anything like this. Isn't it such a comfort though, that God has given us His Word and it never changes? A passage of Scripture that the Spirit of God inspired the apostle Paul to write was meant to encourage and comfort the believers in Philippi. Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Philippians 4, and let's focus our attention on verses six and seven. As your getting to our text let me share with you an article by Mark Oden, a evangelical pastor in Italy, who gave some insights that the Coronavirus should teach us.

1. Our fragility - This global crisis is teaching us how weak we really are as human beings. As of Friday, there were 148,654 cases of the coronavirus worldwide causing 5,547 deaths. Our medical experts have tried to give us all some practical helps to contain the spread of this virus. Now imagine a virus even more aggressive and contagious than coronavirus. Faced with such a threat, could we prevent our own extinction as a people group? The answer is clearly, no. It is easy to forget, but humans are weak and frail. We get sick, as much as we don't like it, we get sick. We are susceptible to disease and death. Listen to what the Psalmist said, **"As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more"** (Psalm 103: 15-16). Never forget God is the giver of life and God desires us to walk godly and righteously in this present world. The Psalmist

said it this way, **“So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).**

2. Our equality - this virus doesn't respect ethnic boundaries or national borders. It's not just the Chinese virus; it's our virus. It's in St. Vincent, Palau, Denmark, Italy, and the United States—one-hundred and forty-nine countries and the number is going up. In the eyes of the world, we're all different; in the eyes of the virus, we're just the same.
3. Our independence - It's so difficult for us to face the loss of control. We all want to be in control? We do have some control over the choices we make. We can only control the temperature in our car or home. We can exercise and have good hygiene. But we can't always control the outcome. We can't control the outcome of the weather. We can't control the outcome of the economy and we can't control the outcome of an out-of-control virus, no matter how much disinfectant we use. We should clean, disinfect and take precautions but we will not be in control of the outcome of this situation. We may think we have control over the circumstances of this life but obviously we don't control the outcome.
4. Our pain - The pain we share of being excluded is not easy. Being excluded or ostracized isn't an easy thing for sure, since we were created for relationships. Quarantine is not easy whether it is self-mandated or not. But many people, now, are having to deal with isolation. It's an experience the leper community of Jesus's day knew all too well.
5. Our views of fear and faith - What's your reaction to this crisis? It's so easy to be gripped by fear. It's easy to see the coronavirus everywhere I look: on the keyboard of my computer, in the air I breathe, in every physical contact and around every corner, waiting to infect me. Are we panicking? Or perhaps this crisis is challenging us to react in a different way—with faith and not with fear. The theme of our message this morning is fear versus faith. Surely only Jesus is in control of this situation; surely only He can guide us through this storm. He calls us to trust and believe,

to have faith and not fear. Friends. Jesus is the only hope for the world.

6. Our need of God and prayer. Our text will address this vitally important discipline this morning.
7. Our perspective in the midst of this challenge. Our days are filled with work, people, projects, sports, in such a way that we struggle to distinguish the important from the urgent. Mark Oden said, “We lose ourselves in the midst of our lives.” This virus gives us perspective as to what is important and what is not. Let me ask, does your perspective change about life in times like we find ourselves today? Priorities? I think they change, especially about life itself. Things I thought were so important start to fade.
8. Our hope - We sang about it this morning, *My Hope is Jesus*. In a sense, the most important question is not, “What hope do you have in the face of the coronavirus?” Because Jesus came to warn us of the presence of a far more deadly and widespread virus—one that has struck every man, woman, and child. A virus that ends in not only certain death, but eternal death. Mankind, according to Jesus, lives in the grip of a pandemic outbreak called sin. What is your hope in the face of this virus?

I trust our text in Philippians will give hope and confidence in this time of uncertainty. Our missionary Richard Hill on the island of St. Vincent let us know this week that they now have their first case of the coronavirus. He went on to tell us that the whole island of 220,000 people went into a complete panic upon hearing the news. He said, soon after, the news all the stores were completely stripped bare. Panic and fear are not just locally centered in one part of the world; it’s all over the globe. It’s a universal problem. Fear, anxiety, worry, are emotional responses that too often can torment even believers. Fear is a powerful enemy. It feeds on itself and breeds so quickly that at times you feel totally consumed by it.

Listen to how the apostle John addressed fear. **“There is not fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (I John 4:18).** God’s love is so much more powerful than fear for the believer. Let’s

look to His Word for some guidance on how to defeat this enemy that can strike panic and torment even believers. Beginning at verse 6, of chapter 4, Paul urges Christians to, **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; (7) and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”**

Prayer: Our Father in heaven thank you for Your Presence and for the Scriptures that You have preserved for us in order to give us help and guidance in times of extreme difficulty. We find ourselves as a church, a community, a nation, and world in a state of panic and fear because of a virus that spreads quickly and has the ability to be fatal. Father, we know that you do not want us to live our lives in fear but in power, love and our minds under the control of Your Spirit. May Your Word give confidence and hope this morning to each of us and may we leave here knowing that You are an all-powerful and all-knowing God who is ever present with us no matter what difficulties in life we face. We pray all of this in Jesus’ precious name. Amen.

Do you know how many times in the Bible the word “fear” is mentioned? Five-hundred times. Do you also remember the phrase, **“Fear not?”** or **“Do not be afraid?”** This phrase or it’s _____ is used three-hundred and sixty-five times in Scripture. Isn’t that incredible—one for each day of the year. In our Scripture reading this morning Dan read the words from God recorded by the prophet Isaiah to the nation of Israel. The main point of the passage is to encourage God’s people not to fear what man or nature can do to them. **“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).** That would be a great verse for you to memorize. Fear, anxiety, worry in the flesh will always deflate our hope and limit our victories.

In this text I would like for you to see the imperatives of what we are to stop doing and what we are to start doing and then what we can expect.

1. What you must stop doing—Stop Worrying! Look at verse 6. **“Be anxious for nothing”** This isn’t an option for Christians who are

more high strung than others—this is a command for every believer. Look at the first thing that Paul states to stop doing. Stop worrying. Paul doesn't leave any room here for any hermeneutical gymnastics. Literally, he is saying in the imperative, "*Do not under any circumstances worry about anything.*" The word that Paul uses here for anxious or worry means to be pulled in different directions. In other words, our hopes pull us in one way and our fear pulls us in another; our understanding of Scripture pulls us this way, and our minds and hearts pulls us that way. Can worry and fear do that to us? Yes it can, because fear is like a monster preying on the mind-set of the unsuspecting. Can you remember times in your life that you were just riveted with fear? Most of Fear's statements begins with a quiet, "What if. . ." and end with a loud. . .and you'll be sorry!" It can transform saints into cynics. Someone graphically described anxiety (worry) as "a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all of our other thoughts are drained" (Arthur Roche, *Reader's Digest* [6/88], p. 64). We often hear phrases like being "stressed out," or having "a panic attack." Christian psychiatrists, Frank Minirth and Paul Meier say that anxiety is the most common mental disorder they encounter at their clinics across our country (*Worry Free Living* [Thomas Nelson], p. 17). Our English word for worry comes from the Old German word *wurpeon* which means to choke or to strangle. And over time it came to refer to a mental strangulation. . .literally choked by anxieties. Paul, perhaps more than anyone, knew that it didn't do you any good to worry. Years ago a professor at a leading American University studied the things people worry about. His research yielded the following results: 40% or worries never happen, 30% concern the past, 12% are needless worries about health, and 10% are about petty issues. Only 8% are legitimate concerns. That means that 92% of your "worry time" is wasted energy. Someone correctly said, "Worry is stewing without doing." Worry is wrong because it assumes that God can't take care of you. It shouldn't be any surprise to us that our Lord dealt with this in His famous Sermon on the Mount—in fact, He spent more verses on the

subject of worrying. When Matthew copied the Lord's sermon into His Gospel, people were living in incredibly difficult conditions; water was scarce; food was a daily need; many had physical needs; workers were paid at the end of every day, which is why the Lord taught them to pray, **"Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11)**. Remember, they didn't store food—there wasn't refrigeration to keep milk or produce fresh; there were no public hospitals, no pharmacies. And Jesus Christ preached to them—**"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing. Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature" (Matthew 6:25-27)**. Yet few of us are strangers to anxiety. People are anxious about this virus today. Some became anxious this week when they couldn't find Lysol wipes, toilet paper or canned green beans. Fear and anxiety creep in, gnawing away at our insides. We feel anxious today about our health, especially as we grow older. What if I get cancer, or the virus, or Alzheimer's? As a parent and a grandfather, I can get anxious about my children and grandchildren. Will they turn out okay? Will they avoid drugs and immorality? Will they be safe during this pandemic of a virus? And yet, sometimes we can't even identify any specific reason for our anxiety, but it's there, nagging away at our insides. Listen, worry strangles your faith; it chokes off your praise; it stifles your courage. It will never build you up—it will only tear you down. Vance Havner, the old North Carolina evangelist who is now with the Lord, put it into folksy language when he said, "Worry is like a rocking chair—it gives you something to do, but it never takes you anywhere." Now we all know this, right? We already know how destructive worry can be and how Satan can use it for us to doubt God's goodness. Listen, the battle of worry has nothing to do with the circumstances of our life; it isn't stealing our joy because our life is worse off than

someone else's—that you've got more problems or challenges than somebody else. No, look at Paul. His prayers were answered probably somewhat different than he intended. He is under house arrest; heading for court with a wicked Emperor, named Nero, and is facing a possible death sentence—and here he is the one telling us to stop worrying.

Transition: This imperative just doesn't tell us something to stop doing—but he tells us something to start doing. Let me ask you—which wing on an airplane is absolutely necessary? The left one or the right one? Exactly, they both are. If you want to stop worry and anxiety, than you have to start something to gain spiritual victory over worry. So, you must do both. Notice in verse 6 this positive command. He's just said, **“Be anxious for nothing,”** and now Paul says, **“let your request be known.”**

2. What you must start doing—Start Praying and praising! He continues, **“but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”** Friends, if we don't follow the biblical mandate here to pray and we continue to worry, it can cause all sorts of health problems, which in turn feed our anxiety.

- Prayer - This word is the general term for simply talking with God. One of the best sources of prayer, when you don't know what to say, is Scripture. The Psalms are a great model for our own worship and prayer. King David lived with all kinds of fear from real dangers. He learned to pour out his heart to God until he was able to rest in confident, joyous peace. Let me give you an example. Psalm 27 would be a great antidote to fear. David meets fear at the door of his heart with two statements and two questions: **“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1).** David must continue to remind himself of the secrets of daily trust:

I have desired of the Lord (Ps. 27:4)— Prayer

To behold the beauty of the Lord (Ps. 27:4)—Vision

I may dwell in the house of the Lord (Ps. 27:4)—God’s Presence

For in the time of trouble He shall hide or/lift me (Ps. 27:5)—God’s protection

I will offer sacrifices. . .I will sing (Ps. 27:6)—Worship

I would have lost heart unless I had believed (Ps. 27:13-14)—Rest

Be of good courage (Ps. 27:14)—Determination

Listen, no prayer offered to anybody but God the Father through the God the Son gets heard. Talking to God—as His child—is simply called prayer.

- Supplication is made with **“thanksgiving.”** Thanksgiving is praising! It’s amazing what praising can do! At the root of our prayers must be thanksgiving for what God has done for us in Christ through the gospel. When you’re anxious, and in some situation that gives some cause for anxiety, a heart of thankfulness will reflect three reminders 1) Remembrance of God’s supply in the past; 2) Submission to God’s sovereignty in the present; and 3) Trust in God’s sufficiency for the future. Prayer can help us see God at work in a crisis. Every concern or activity is to be carried out with thanksgiving and praise. Paul told the Colossians, **“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17).** Listen, here’s the brutal truth—without thanksgiving—most often our praying is spiritualized complaining. Our prayer list is nothing more than whining about not getting our way. Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Even God the Father enjoys hearing His children say, ‘Thank You!’ every once in a while.” Remember that God is in control over everything, and when we start praying with thanksgiving, it’s then we begin to stop worrying about anything. The word **“supplication”** gives prominence to the sense of need and specifics. This confirms to us our own weakness and God’s great faithfulness in meeting our needs. What an opportunity we have to meet needs of people right

now. Possibly our neighbors. I don't know that we have anyone in the church right now that has contracted this virus but we do have many in our church who are sick and in need. We need to uphold them in prayer. And we also need to meet their needs.

- Requests - The three synonyms used here, “**prayer, supplication, and requests**” all refer to specific, direct offerings of petition to God. The assumption here is that believers will cry out to God when they have a need or a problem, not with doubting, questioning, or even blaming God but with **thanksgiving**. I can get so focused on things down here that I get so distracted, that I don't take my need to the Lord—prayer directs us back toward God.

Transition: So let's just summarize what Paul has been saying in six words. Let's get them clearly fixed in our minds. These six words will form the foundation of God's therapeutic process for all anxieties and fears.

WORRY ABOUT NOTHING
PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING

Finally, this morning, look at what you should expect. The force of Paul's imperatives produces a glorious result.

3. What you can expect - v. 7 “**and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**” Paul's imperatives should bring peace to panic stricken Christians. To those of you who are followers of Jesus, listen to what He promised, “**Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid**” (John 14:27). As you share with God every need with thanksgiving, God shares with you His character and there is not one hint of worry or anxiety with God. He has it all under control. So His peace becomes your peace and this peace is not natural, it's supernatural. Paul even adds—“**it surpasses all understanding.**” It goes beyond intellectual powers, human analysis, human insights, and human understanding. So, the real challenge for us as Christians is not

worrying about how to eliminate every unpleasant fear or trial or even try to understand them; but how to trust your infinite, wise, powerful God. Think of it— you are being guarded by the peace of God—and notice what He’s guarding—“**Your heart** (that’s what you’re feeling) **and your mind** (that’s what you’re thinking).” The combination of hearts and minds effectively sums up the whole inner being. There is a battle in my inner being as to if I am going to let the Lord have complete control of my life. Many times we become so defeated in our minds. I understand Pastor Joe taught on the mind this last week in his Sunday school class. You need to renew or renovate your mind. It needs a complete overhaul.

Conclusion: We have all wondered how did this virus start? One man hit the nail on the head when he said, “It started with Adam and Eve.” When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden a pandemic outbreak of sin blanketed the hear to every person born thereafter. I can I tell you that before the foundations of the world were created, God had a redemptive plan in place to save the world from sin. God’s antidote for this deadly curse of sin came in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. But let’s not forget what Jesus commissioned us to do: Give this frail world the antidote. Jesus is the eternal cure. His death, burial and resurrection offer eternal hope. Let’s not quarantine the gospel message of salvation. People are worried and are thinking about death like never before and Jesus Christ is the answer for the world today. For you as a believer, Jesus is your anchor. Friends, life is out of control because the prince of this world is Satan and he is conflict with God.

But, is life ultimately out of control? No, it’s not and that’s why one of the most important books in our Bible—which seems to give us a worst case scenario—is the book of Job. Job’s world turns upside down, yet God was in total control.

God uses crisis to get our attention. Fear brings us close to the heart of God. Friends, when the coronavirus, or cancer, or any other catatrasophe comes, lets heed God’s Word and stop worrying and let’s start praying and praising. What an opportunity we have to live with the confidence of our faith in such an uncertain time. So let’s support one another and keep the end in view.

Prayer: