

SERMON NOTES Sunday 12th December

sunnysidechurch

Bible passages Philippians 4.4-7 & Luke 3.7-18

Introduction

Philippians 4:4-7 comes in the context of an awareness that some of those who have not only begun well, but have journeyed well, and stood firm for the gospel, now appear to be having second thoughts. Perhaps they are counting the cost of following Jesus and are hesitating, and even now contemplating turning back.

Our passage from Philippians is meant to be an encouragement to us to keep going and there are **three** points that I want to share that I believe Paul was sharing with the people from Philippi.

Firstly, God is Near: At the heart of the good news of Jesus is the announcement that God is near. God is not a distant or aloof God, requiring sacrifice before he draws close to sinful humanity. In Jesus, God has come close. **Immanuel 'God with us'**. Whatever we go through in the struggle to follow Jesus and to be his witness, "the Lord is near." This is intended to bring comfort and solace, to encourage and strengthen the faith of everyone who has ever stepped out on this journey. Do we know him to be near to us?

Secondly, God Hears: He hears our prayers and they matter to him. The encouragement to pray is one that we all need, but so often overlooked when things get tough. He tells us that in our prayers we can and should include **everything**. He tells us in prayer to **give thanks** to God not for the trials but for God, for his goodness, for his presence, for his listening ear. Paul tells us to make your requests known to God because he hears us.

Thirdly, God calls us not to Fear: There is a reason "do not fear" is the command repeated so often in the Bible. We humans are prone to anxiety. Paul tells us that we shouldn't fear, we shouldn't be anxious. Easy said than done. But we have good news that our God, the God who is near, the God who hears us, who doesn't just call us not to be anxious and leaves us to sort it out ourselves but he give us his peace.

Conclusion: When the life of following Christ gets tough and we want to choose another path Paul is clear that if we **hold on** and we **pray**, then the wonderful, mysterious, peace of God will **guard** and keep safe our hearts and minds. We might still feel afraid or forget to pray but we can believe and know that God is with us. His peace he gives to us. We may not be in control, but we can trust the One who is. We may not know the future, but we can know the God who does.

Some questions for discussion

1. How has your faith been over the this last 20 months? Has this time encouraged growth in your faith or has it struggled?
2. Does reading Philippians 4.4-7 encourage you in your faith?
3. Read Luke 3.7-18. What is John the Baptist encouraging people to produce and what is the warning? How does this warning make you feel?
4. What fears or anxieties do you struggle with? What worries you? Living in a time of uncertainty? Health? Finances? Will I see my family for Christmas? Take some time to name them and pray about them.
5. Can you think of any Biblical characters whom God told 'Do not fear'? What truths about God surrounds these commands?
6. What truths can you take away with you from Philippians 4.4-7?

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.(John 14.27)

Rachel Hamilton