

ST TIMOTHY'S CHURCH - SERMON NOTES + GROUP NOTES

DATE	SUBJECT (also at StTims.org.uk)	TEXTS
16/12/06	Have no anxiety	Phil 4.4-7, Rom 12.12,13 Lk 3.7-18

Have no anxiety -- don't worry about anything! **What an amazing thing to say!** How can we stop worrying?
Worrying and anxiety seemed to be the occupational hazards of being human!

There is an endless list of things to worry about.

Have I got enough money to pay my bills? What about my health? My family? My job?
Is my house secure? Is my car secure? Is my life secure? Is my future secure? Are my children secure?
Will I get that job? Get that promotion? Avoid that redundancy?
Can I keep on top of all the things I have to do just to survive? Can I keep this up? Can I hold things together? Have I got enough time to fit everything in?
Will people like me? Will people accept me? Will I be popular? Will I have friends? Will I find the right partner?
How will I ever recover from that mess that I've got myself into? If people really knew the truth about me, would they accept me? Will they ever discover the truth about me? Can I keep up appearances?
Like I said, there is an endless list of things to worry about!

So how come St Paul says do not worry about anything? Have no anxiety about anything?

Because the Lord is coming soon, so he says in verse five. The Lord is near, the Lord is at hand.

What does he mean by this?

Well in one sense he means that because all this is passing away, in the end does it really matter? One day the Lord will return, and all our problems will seem very minor compared with the weighty issues of life. Compared with the joy that will be revealed then! On judgment Day I don't think many of us are going to be worried about how much we weigh, or whether we got that promotion, or even if we got married!

Yes, but that all seems still very far away, it could be next week, but it could be in 50 years time or more. Meanwhile we have to live with all these difficulties and anxieties.

But there is another sense in which we can be encouraged by the idea of that the Lord is at hand, the Lord is coming soon. In one sense it means that we can be confident that the Lord will come to rescue us here and now, will protect and deliver us and provide for us here and now. That all we had to do is cry out to the Lord and he will deliver us. This is very much the sentiment of Psalm 18:

18 How I love you, LORD!

You are my defender.

²The LORD is my protector;
he is my strong fortress...

⁴The danger of death was all round me;
the waves of destruction rolled over me...

⁶In my trouble I called to the LORD;
I called to my God for help.

In his temple he heard my voice;
he listened to my cry for help.

⁷Then the earth trembled and shook;
the foundations of the mountains rocked and
quivered, because God was angry.

⁸Smoke poured out of his nostrils, this a consuming
flame and burning coals from his mouth.

⁹He tore the sky apart and came down
with a dark cloud under his feet.

¹⁰He flew swiftly on a winged creature;
he travelled on the wings of the wind.

¹¹He covered himself with darkness;
thick clouds, full of water, surrounded him.

¹²Hailstones and flashes of fire
came from the lightning before him
and broke through the dark clouds....

¹⁶The LORD reached down from above and took hold of
me; he pulled me out of the deep waters

→ **A very graphic description of Gods desire to rescue!**

But what assurance do we have that the Lord is waiting to deliver us, ready to rescue us, to protect us and provide for us? What's so special about me, that I should have confidence that the Lord will take a personal interest in my life and will come to my aid whenever I am insecure, or under threat? I can see so many things **wrong** in my life: I am unworthy, I am not a good Christian, so I don't in any sense feel confident that the Lord will come to my aid.

It's all about grace. We cannot understand the depth and breadth and height of God's love reach one of us, how tenderly and intimately he cares for our every need. How he delights in us. This is far beyond our understanding. **We cannot fully understand- but we can dare to try!**

The nature of God as revealed to us in Scripture is that fundamentally he is a God of grace and mercy. That *it was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us upon the cross. Even if I had been the only one who had sinned in the whole world – I believe he would have come and died for me (as Aslan did for Edmund in Narnia)*

I think it was last week that I quoted that saying that seems to capture this idea of grace so well: "**There is nothing that we can do to make God love us more, and there is nothing that we can do to make God love us less.**"

There is nothing that can separate us from his love, and there's nothing that can separate us from his blessing, and his desire to bless us. His blessing upon our lives and his love are an unstoppable.

If we begin to understand the significance of this, then this releases us from anxiety and fear. Quoting Paul again from Romans eight, "if God is for us who can be against us? Certainly not God who did not keep back his own son but gave him freely for us all, if he gave us his own son would he not also freely give us all things?"

This is a truth that we need to meditate upon and pray about that it would permeate more deeply into the very ground of our being, and their take root and grow and flourish so that it will affect our lives, **transform** our lives.

If we do believe that God is waiting in the wings to come and rescue us, and all we need to do is cry out to him to help, then what St Paul says next follows on very naturally. He says, "Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers **ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart.**" (Philippians 4.6)

Instead of worrying, we should pray, but not the cringing fearful prayer of someone who is expecting the answer no, but the joyful thankful prayer of someone who was expecting the answer yes. So says St Paul.

And the result of all this? The result of this recording St Paul is that God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep our hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.

What does he mean by this? **Why will the peace of God keep our minds safe in union with Christ?** So often **anxiety causes a great amount of trouble, not just to ourselves, but to others too.** We become bad-tempered, irritable, lacking in generosity and mercy, thinking of ourselves, rather than thinking of others. We tend to do things in our own strength desperately trying to gain some security for ourselves, and stop other people threatening us. → Ignoring the needs of those around us, because we are so preoccupied with our own safety.

If we live this way, we cannot live in union with Christ Jesus, we cannot live generous lives like he did, **because we are not putting our hope and trust in God as he did.** But if we have peace in our hearts, a fundamentally we are content to trust in the heavenly provision and protection of God our father, then we can be at peace, and can walk in humble obedience to the spirit of God in our lives.

Only if we are in a state of trusting peace can we walk in obedience and in union with Christ, living generously as he did..

But such peace is far more positive than the absence of stress. St Paul says "May you be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!" (Philippians 4.4)

...to have such hope in the goodness of God towards us in the unstoppable power to bless us no matter how the circumstances appear, gives a great sense of joy.

Again in Romans 12, St Paul says *let your hope keep you joyful.* What a joyful thing it is to have such hope and expectancy that God will deliver us, as much from our own mistakes and sins, as the sins of others around us!

Such joy and peace is not a private thing, just for ourselves: Such JOY results in a changed attitude towards others says St Paul: *let your hope keep you joyful... share your belongings with your needy fellow Christians, and open your homes to strangers.*

Once again, to be set free from anxiety, because we are confident in the grace and generosity of God towards us, should naturally result in us being more gracious and generous to others in their need.

Grace and generosity is the hallmark of God, and is the hallmark of all people who have genuinely understood this great truth. The hallmark of God's people therefore should be generosity of spirit. That is why, in Luke chapter 3, John the Baptist says to those who inquire how they should be ready for the coming of the Messiah, *let him who has two shirts give to him who has none, and he who has food should share it.*

Is this grace and generosity the hallmark of our lives? Do we believe in the grace and generosity of God towards us? Are we willing to put our trust in him? To be at peace that he does care, and will provide? That nothing can stop his blessing towards us?

If generosity and grace is not the hallmark of our lives, then it is likely that we have not yet fully believed - or understood or received. It is something that we need to reconsider this Christmas, as we think of the generosity of God sent to us in the coming of his Son Jesus vulnerable and weak. **HE CAME FOR YOU.**