

Sermon
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Mark Carter

Paul seems to have a clear vision about how our future in Christ effects our daily lives.

Our squabbles, arguments, frustrations with people, are the results of sin in us and others. But what we see in this text is that God is going to change Our bodies to be like Christ's and all this stuff that causes so much disunity and frustration on our part will no longer plague all those who belong to Jesus and whose names are written in the book of life (4:3).

Paul has been emphasizing the application of the second coming of Jesus for the church. In 3:11 (, 21; 4:3, 5) Paul keeps referring back to our future hope because of what Jesus means for those who have faith in him. Our bodies will be resurrected (3:11). Our bodies will be transformed to be like the glory of Jesus body (3:21). Those who work with Paul in sharing the gospel are recorded in the book of life (4:3; Dan 12:1). And all this comes together with his final statement that all this coming change will take place soon or has already begun.

The prophets referred to the 'day of the Lord' that would come. For Paul, the day is "near", it is upon us. The Advent of Jesus is the first sign of "spring" in terms of God's kingdom growing and breaking forth on the earth. With the end in mind, we toil now for the work of the gospel. This then is the backdrop for his instruction regarding anxiety, which is "do not be anxious".

But why? What is strong enough to stop our worrying. After all, the things we worry about could very well happen and the thought is bad enough let alone going through it.

What are your worries? Running out of money? Being rejected by people? Being alone? Contracting Covid-19 or some other disease?

I want to ask: Why shouldn't I worry about these things?

The answer is not to just ignore these issues or to just not think about them. The answer is God knows about these things, he cares about you and each of these issues you are concerned about, and we should ask God to help us with each of these things.

Maybe you are anxious about something right now. What will you do with that worry?

On top of prayer and knowing God is intimately concerned with us, Paul also points us to ultimate reality, which is the time when Jesus will return and change everything.

Throughout this letter, Paul keeps pointing to the end; the return of Jesus and the resurrection to eternal life.

Life today is lived in the light of eternal life with Jesus.

So what does that mean?

It means living in unity with other believers, even when there is a dispute. It means turning aside from earthly thinking (3:19) and instead focusing on what is true, pure, commendable, and more.

See, if you are anything like me, it is easy to get caught up in the details of daily life, with appointments, deadlines, tasks, and inner thoughts. Of course this is a necessary part of life, but should it consume us? No, because the Lord is near.

I don't think this means we should become "so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good" as the saying goes. In fact, it seems like Paul says the opposite, he is so heavenly focussed that that he does not succumb to earthly anxiety.

For example, I could be anxious about not being able to administrate, plan, organize, and facilitate the necessary things for our house churches to flourish (getting real here). So how can I apply this text to my situation? "Don't worry Mark, Jesus is coming back soon and he will take care of it! Not exactly."

What I see here is a roadmap to the conclusion. Paul points us to the end, which is the glorious return of Jesus and his restoration of creation. What that does for me is orient me to God's will.

I may face a myriad of possibilities, with questions and tasks, some of which I will fail in, but I know the end.

I can rejoice now even when I face the same impossible situations and doubts because God has already won and all I need to do is be faithful to follow him through the fog of life.

I will rejoice even when it is hard to feel like rejoicing because . . .

. . . Jesus is near.

The Church in Isolation: Living with the end in mind

Philippians 4:2-9

In this section, Paul wraps up his message with a final example of why living in unity is important and how it relates to the Christian walk. He brings together many themes from the letter in this conclusion. He encourages unity, rejoicing, lifting our concerns to God in prayer, and living peaceable lives for others to see God's peace in us. Finally, he lists the things that we should be thinking about, which is in contrast to the "earthly things" the enemies of Christ think about (3:19)

1. Resolve differences for the sake of the gospel 4:2-3

Here, Paul encourages Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. He also indicates that they both have been working for the sake of the gospel along with Paul and others. He ends by saying that all these co workers in the gospel have their names written in the book of life, a reference to those who are saved from coming destruction in Daniel 12:1 and in Revelations 3:5

Question:

1. What kind of disagreement could stop you from working with someone in ministry?
2. What needs to happen in order to restore fellowship as believers even if it means going separate ways?

2. Responding to God's grace 4:4-7

In this section, Paul gives some final instructions to believers along with the blessings they will receive for living as though Jesus is about to return and restore all things (4:6).

Questions:

1. Describe what it feels like to rejoice when your life situation is not joyful.
2. Have you experienced contagious joy from someone?
3. Share with someone a time when giving something to God in prayer has resulted in peace in that situation.

3. Thoughts and Actions

Questions:

1. What are examples of earthly thinking (3:19)?
2. What is one way you can practice thinking about the "worthy" things in 4:8?
3. What are examples of what Paul has done, said, and taught for us to follow?