

Location: First Baptist Church, October 15, 2023
Title: Breaking the Stress Cycle
(Theme: God consciousness must be learned.)
Text: *Philippians 4:1-9*

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. 2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, 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 your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.

I must begin today with a confession. This past week was very stressful and even depressing as we heard about all manner of violence and destruction unfolding in the Middle East and elsewhere worldwide. It was hard to get away from the news, and even the weather seemed to contribute to the sombre mood as rain and chill descended upon us. It can be a considerable effort to rise above it all at times like these. Everyone is subject to such moments, but we would do well today to consider how we can avoid being swallowed up when such times come, and they most assuredly will.

One issue many people face is that bad, sad or depressing news can have a strong psychological effect on sensitive people; for some, that effect can penetrate deeper than it does for others. Something you can shake off may not

be easy for the person sitting beside you. October is mental health awareness month (one of two in the year), and it is appropriate to consider how we should respond to or help others who are having difficulty.

Of all the people in the Bible, no one had more cause to be despondent than the apostle Paul. But look at the encouraging words he writes in today's text. He was aware that the Philippian church was facing unprecedented persecution, and he was chained in the dank darkness of a Roman prison at the time. Yet even in these dire circumstances, he writes those words of encouragement and hope, "Rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again, rejoice."

Paul had discovered the vital importance of looking at life through Jesus Christ. This principle is something I often forget, and perhaps you do too. The world and all its negativity, bad news, even tragedy is not the final word.

God still reigns supreme and is in complete control of everything that is going on. That doesn't mean our lives here on earth will never experience sadness, heartbreak, or sorrow. But it does mean that despite all that suffering, God is deftly shaping this planet to fit into his glorious plan of redemption and the ultimate salvation of all who will believe. We may not understand the whys and wherefores now, but soon, God will put everything right according to his will.

When we look at the world through Jesus Christ, just as Paul does here, we see things in a new light. Yes, sorrow and pain may be our lot now, and the world may be filled with sadness and shame, but the glory of God will soon dawn out of this darkness, and what a glorious day that will be.

That is why Paul is calling the Philippians to rejoice. We do not rejoice because of pain and suffering but despite it! Believers are safe and secure in the arms of Jesus, and nothing can change that fact. Even death must bow down to the Lord and Savior and give way to him. Things may seem bad now, and they are, but this is all temporary because a new dawn is on the way. Rejoice, believer, and again, I say rejoice. The battle has already been fought, and the victory has been obtained.

So to anyone here this morning who is feeling even a little downhearted and discouraged, I want to say to you, look up, look at it all through Jesus, and you will find that there is plenty to be thankful for and celebrate today, to the glory of our living, loving God. Rejoice! Amen.