

“Whatever?”—Philippians 4:8-9

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Whatever?”, is Philippians 4:8-9 → *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

The challenge of maintaining a positive attitude in life is never ending. This is a given since we see and feel the affects of sinfulness in this world at every turn. Think about the conversations in which you engage on a daily basis; think about the news you encounter daily; think about the constant health issues which take up much of your time and energy, whether your own or the struggles of those near and dear to you. Actually, you may have become so accustomed to hearing and seeing crime, mayhem, illness, injustice, hatred and so forth that it’s

simply “a given,” that which makes up our living together on this planet.

In the past seven months our minds have been flooded with a barrage of information concerning the progress of the corona virus within our nation. Turn on TV, it's corona virus; visit with people, it's corona virus; try to work, it's corona virus; think about going to the store, it's corona virus. Listening to this sermon, it's . . . corona virus again? Whatever! It seems to never end! No wonder it's so difficult to think positively, *give thanks in all circumstances* (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:18), *do all things without grumbling or disputing* (cf. Philippians 2:14), and keep *the will of God in Christ Jesus for you* (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:18) in clear focus **at all times**.

Over these past months we have also experienced people striving in what seems to be a pandemic prison to be positive with light-hearted jokes and creative videos which solicit laughter. Leaders in government tried their best to reassure everyone that things would get back to normal once we've weathered this storm. Hallmark showed Christmas movies and some people decorated with Christmas lights in an effort to make people feel good in the midst of minds cluttered with negative, depressing thoughts. These are ways in which the world strives to find some kind of positive thinking in adverse circumstances. In contrast, when the apostle Paul and his missionary companion, Silas, were sitting in prison unjustly they *were praying and singing hymns to God as the*

prisoners were listening to them (cf. Acts 16:25). What are you doing when feeling imprisoned by something? Where do you turn when you feel like you're in captivity? Where do you find your peace when it feels like death is looming on the horizon of each day?

While Paul wrote the words of our text in conclusion to his letter to the Christians in Philippi he was in prison. In fact, the exhortation he places before them (and us today by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) is reflected in the letter itself. He viewed his persecution and imprisonment as serving to *advance the gospel*, giving other Christians more confidence to *speak the word of God without fear* (cf. Philippians 1:12-14). He even contemplated his death because it was a real possibility instead of being released from prison. Aside from one verse asking two Christian women in Philippi *to agree in the Lord* (cf. Philippians 4:2), this is the only letter of Paul written to a Christian congregation in which he does not rebuke them for behavior unbecoming of a Christian. It is positive and encouraging in its totality.

In Philippians 3:17 Paul said: *Brothers, join in imitating me*. In verse 9 of our text he again reinforced this thought: *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things*. So, what have you *learned and received and heard and seen in Paul*? When you open God's Word and read his letters you encounter a sinner who lived in a world of sin just as we, facing death each day, whether by

persecution, physical illness, through an accident, or . . . whatever, even a virus. However, you also encounter a sinner who lived **with** . . . *the God of peace* by faith in Jesus.

The focus is on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and your bodily resurrection to eternal life. Even those things which Paul tells us to *think about* or fix our minds upon in verse 8 of our text find their reality in Jesus. He says to *think about* . . .

- . . . *whatever is true*. We live in a culture where we could throw up our hands and exclaim with Pontius Pilate in frustration: *What is truth?* (cf. John 18:38). Sin turns truth into personal choice, thus making it relative to each individual and each situation. Jesus said to Pilate at His mock trial in John 18:37 → *For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice*. His voice reassures you of the truth that you have peace with God in sins forgiven and release from the power of sin even in the midst of the presence of sin through faith in Jesus.
- . . . *whatever is honorable*. When you honor something or someone you actually value that thing or person. You treat it with more respect in your life. According to Jesus' words in John 5:22-23, *God has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not*

honor the Father Who sent Him. Jesus took the judgment of God upon your sin in His sacrifice on the cross. Thus, a true respect for God flows only from faith in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ.

- . . . *whatever is just.* While Jesus experienced the unjust cruelty of the devil and his offspring (i.e. sinners) throughout His earthly ministry, He did so in all humility, *entrusting Himself to God Who judges justly* or in righteousness (cf. 1 Peter 2:23). True justice is found in Jesus Who is Lord. We seek what's right and just according to His word.
- . . . *whatever is pure.* 1 John 3:2-3 speaks about God's children being like Jesus in the bodily resurrection when we see Him at His second coming on the Last Day. It says: *Everyone who thus hopes in Christ purifies himself as He is pure.* Thinking about what is pure is setting our thoughts on Jesus.
- . . . *whatever is lovely.* The Greek gives the idea of "that which points to love." The perfect love of God in Christ Jesus for us sinners (cf. 1 Corinthians 13; Romans 5:6-8) is so lovely that it moves us to express that same love toward others. As 1 John 4:19 simply states: *We love because He first loved us.*
- . . . *whatever is commendable.* The Greek word has the sense "of good repute." It has to do with speaking words in our conversations in such a manner *as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that*

it may give grace to those who hear (cf. Ephesians 4:29).

- . . . *anything of excellence and worthy of praise*. While the world does occasionally recognize those actions of people which they consider excellent and *worthy of praise*, it is interesting how fleeting such actions are in the minds of people in comparison to sinful actions. The affects of sinfulness are evident simply in this one dynamic of life: You may receive many kudos for something you do but that which frames your mind and attitude is the one criticism made. The sinner has a struggle dealing with the positive in the midst of the negative. Revelation 5:12 puts a perspective on *excellence and worthy of praise*. It's the vision of those in heaven *saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"*

You may be tempted to read the words of our text and say sarcastically, "Whatever! How can I think about such things with so much negative information thrown at me from every direction of life these days!" *Finally* . . . at the end of the day you may even feel emotionally, physically, mentally and even spiritually drained.

Jesus did much more than lead you to positive thinking in an effort to distract you from facing your mortality for a moment. Whatever He did and whatever He taught was to bring you face to face with your mortality and your life eternal. He gives sinners the ability to live ***with*** . . . *the God*

of peace by His suffering, death and resurrection, even with mortality looming on the horizon of every day, all the time, virus or no virus. The Holy Spirit gives you the same confession as Paul expressed earlier in this letter to the Christians in Philippi: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain* (cf. Philippians 1:21).

Thus, as our minds get filled with reports and discussions about deaths, violence, mayhem, and so forth, we go to the Source which reveals what is eternally *true . . . honorable . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . commendable*, excellent and *worthy of praise*. We fill our minds with God's written Word, the Bible, because there the Holy Spirit brings us to Jesus, our Prince of Peace and Lord of all. Amen.

In Christ, Isaiah 26:3-4 find its fulfillment,

not just at the end of the day but all day long:

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You,

because he trusts in You.

Trust in the LORD forever,

for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.

The God of peace is with you in Christ!

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