

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on October 19, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb on Philippians 4:4-9.

Series: Stuck?

Today's Focus: Rejoicing

“Keep Calm...and Rejoice On!”



If you're online or you use social media, I'm guessing a lot of you have seen this graphic popping up {pic1}. Keep Calm and Carry On. Any of you know the story behind this? It's fascinating. Keep Calm and Carry On was originally a motivational poster made by the British government in 1939 in preparation for World War II. It was intended to raise the morale of the British public which felt threatened by the possibility of German air raids—which of course happened. And I'm sure that was a very anxious time for people living in London and other major British cities that were under the constant, real threat of nightly attacks. Yet there's the thing. Almost 2.5 million of these Keep Calm and Carry On posters were created, yet they were never publically displayed. In fact little was known about them until a copy was rediscovered in 2000. Since then however it's been used as a sort of inspirational theme by all sorts of people and companies—many even selling a wide range of products.

For example, you've got messages like these... {pic2, pic3, pic4}



Now those are kind of funny, aren't they? Sometimes it's good to just laugh when you're starting to feel stressed out or overwhelmed. That can help. But Keep Calm and Carry On was originally designed for a pretty serious situation for people who would be stuck in their homes as bombs exploded around them in their city. (I don't think Batman ever came to help.) And while I don't pretend to know what that's actually like to live through an air raid, I do know by experience that when life gets really tough it can feel overwhelming. When one thing after another just keeps coming at you, it can make you feel like you're helplessly stuck. And what do you do then? How do you react? Well here's how I'm tempted to react. Maybe you feel like this sometimes too. Like this... {pic5, pic6, pic7, pic8, pic9}



Well today as we journey into chapter four of Paul's letter to the Philippians, we're going to get some wisdom that actually makes a difference when we feel anxious, overwhelmed, and under attack. And

like a lot of what we've been learning in this series *Stuck?*...it's counter intuitive. It's going to take the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts and lives through God's Word to believe this... {pic10}



That's right...**Keep Calm and Rejoice On!** And we're going to look at this from a couple practical angles: By praying, by thanking, by thinking, and by practicing what Paul preached. Here's what Paul says,

⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* So here's our theme: **Keep Calm and Rejoice On!** Always! No matter what! ⁵ *Let your gentleness be evident to all.* How many of you are gentle? I spent some time studying this word in Greek and what I found I think is interesting. That word translated "gentleness" here by the NIV has the idea of being willing to yield for the sake of others. In other words it's the quality of you having a forbearing attitude.

You're willing to put up with people even when reason might suggest you react differently sometimes. So you're not quick to pounce on every petty thing that somebody does just because you don't like it that way or you would do it differently. You're not going to be the kind of person who always makes a mountain out of mole hill. You aren't going to say, "Well if I don't get my way here than I'm just gonna take my ball and go home." That sort of thing. Why? Because... *The Lord is near.* ⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

So **Keep Calm and Rejoice On!** How? By praying first of all. By praying about the stuff that makes you feel anxious. This is going to sound really silly but some of the most nervous times in my life where when I had a grade school cross country meet. I could never sleep the night before. Or when we had a Geography Bee at school. Oh man I'd get worked up about that. I'd spend hours at night worrying about how I would perform, imagining all the ways things could go wrong. And none of that ever helped me at all even though to some extent those were things in life I had some ability to control.

What Paul is saying here is imagine if instead of dwelling on the things that are beyond your ability to control, you just cast them upon God in prayer. If you just stopped mid-worry and said, "Alright I know what's going on here. I'm getting worked about this and I can't do this on my own anyway so 'Dear God, I need you to handle this. Ok, you got this, God? Good, because here you go. I'm giving this to you. And thank you because I need to get some sleep. So please take care of these people that I love. Please help so-and-so who's in trouble. Please be with those people over there. And please give me the relief of knowing that you've got this problem in my life under control and that you're going to work this out for my good even if I don't see the outcome I desire. And thank you God for this specific blessing in my life,

and for that good thing that I enjoy, and for the gift of your forgiveness and grace for Jesus' sake. Amen.”

You see, prayer is designed to be God's peace mechanism. When you feel stuck, bombarded with anxious and worried thoughts, God invites you to pray. About anything. About anyone. At any time. With any words. He invites you to pray. ⁷ *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Praying can give you peace. What relief there is in knowing, “God's got this.” This isn't just some psychological mumbo jumbo. This is the peace of God, a sense of well-being that can only come from God, a peace which transcends all human understanding. It's something God gives to those who take their troubles to him in prayer and trust that he's got this. No wonder so many of the Psalms in the Old Testament invite us to turn to God in prayer by telling us that he is our refuge and strength. He is our fortress. He is our rock. He is our shield.

Keep Calm and Rejoice On! By praying. And also *by thanking* because Paul says, ⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* You know the last couple weeks our Scripture lessons from the Old Testament have highlighted the wilderness journey of the Israelites. And doesn't it seem to you like all they did was complain? I mean they saw God's miraculous deliverance with their own eyes. They ate the food and drank the water that God provided while in the desert. But it's like all they could do was whine. Why?

Because they grumbled about what they thought they lacked instead being grateful to God for what he actually supplied. We heard in our lesson today, *“But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”* (Numbers 21:4-5). Now did they have enough food? Yes. Had God taken care of them up to that point? Yes. Had God promised to continue to take care of them in the future? Yes. But instead of praying to God with gratitude they grumbled and took it out on the leaders God had appointed for them.

How many times haven't we done the same? It is not to our credit that so many times we overlook the ways God takes care of us and we complain out loud about what we would do if we were God or in charge instead. How many times we greedily hold back our would-be generous giving to the church because we worry about God's ability to supply our future needs. How many times we grumble about our government instead of praying for our elected leaders. How many times we use social media as an outlet for venting about our frustrations compared to the times we use it as an opportunity for thanking God for our blessings. No wonder we sometimes allow anxiety to bombard our spirit when we can find time for doing almost anything frivolous on our phones yet somehow insist that we have no time to pray.

So God punished the ungrateful Israelites with a plague of poisonous snakes. Yikes, right?! But the thing is, he wouldn't be unjust if he punished us in a similar way. And yet...God is so merciful that we don't get the punishment we do deserve and he is so gracious that we do get the blessings that we don't deserve. And so Paul tells us, *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!”* Friends, **Keep Calm and Rejoice On!** By praying, by thanking, and now let's talk about by thinking. Paul says,

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

So **Keep Calm and Rejoice On!** How? By thinking about *whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things*. I personally fail to see which of those categories Satanic horror movies, gory Halloween decorations, or sexually suggestive Halloween costumes fits under. But God's Word reminds us that we need to fill our thoughts about what is true and noble and pure. Because what you watch, what you see, what you read, what you download, where you go and what you wear...it impacts you. What fills your heart, leads your life. If you consume darkness, don't be surprised when you find darkness in your soul and it fills up your life.

However, we worship a God who has overcome the darkness—Jesus Christ, the light of the world. This is why I enjoy getting to sanctify this space and preach in a movie theater. It's why we push past the horror movie posters and Halloween decorations to worship Jesus Christ who was lifted up on the cross so that everyone who to this day looks upon him in faith will be saved. Because it's on the cross where Jesus Christ crushed the devil's head. That's where he won forgiveness for all our sins when he paid our penalty in full.

That's where three days later Jesus Christ rose triumphant from the dead so that by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, he will one day transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. We worship the Commander in chief of the universe, the God of angel armies. We praise the God who speaks to us through his word. We sing of him whose love is boundless and whose faithfulness never fails. We pray to the one true God who listens to our prayers because he cares for us and knows every detail of our lives. We worship our Savior of whom the Scriptures say, *"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it"* (John 1:4-5).

So **Keep Calm and Rejoice On!** Finally Paul says, ⁹ *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.* Now because I'm not an inspired apostle, I'm always a little hesitant to say, "Ok everyone, whatever you have seen or heard in me, be sure and go put it into practice." But I think I'm on safe ground if I point you to a story from Paul's own life. And that's how I'm going to wrap up today.

Now you know that when Paul wrote Philippians, he wrote it from Rome where he was in prison. But did you know that Paul was once actually also in prison in Philippi? He had been stripped and beaten. He had been placed in the innermost cell of the prison. His feet were placed in the stocks. And yet 'round midnight Paul and his friend Silas who'd been put in prison with him...they were praying and singing hymns and songs of praise to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Then suddenly there was an earthquake. The foundations of the prison were shaken. The doors flew open. Everybody's chains came loose. And when the jailor woke up and saw the situation he pulled out his sword. He was going to take his own life. He thought that was something he had to do since he had failed as a jailor.

But then he heard a voice shout, “Don’t do it! We’re all here! Don’t harm yourself!” And he thought, “Wait a minute, that sounds like that guy Paul who was praying instead of cursing and who was singing with joy about a Savior named Jesus instead of complaining about his problems. Maybe there’s still something I can do!” So the jailer ran down the hall, threw himself at Paul’s feet and said, “What must I do to be saved?”

And you know what Paul said? *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved —you and your household* (Acts 16:31). Friends, is there any more joyful news than this—the gospel, the good news of God’s unconditional grace through faith in Jesus Christ?

And it gets even better! In Acts 16:32-34 it says, ³² *Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.* ³³ *At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.* ³⁴ *The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.*

So why I am telling you this story? Because faith means joy! I don’t know what you think being a Christian means. But this is the biggest thing for me. It’s about having joy in all circumstances because you know that you’re valuable, you’re forgiven, you’re loved, and so you can just let God handle it. And that no matter how bad it gets, heaven is your real home. Joy doesn’t mean that your life is always easy or that everything goes just the way you want it to. Joy doesn’t mean that you always have to have a smile on your face and a bounce in your step. But joy does mean that you can trust God and be grateful in every situation—even should you end up stuck in prison. So praying, thanking, thinking... **Keep Calm and Rejoice On!** Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, Rejoice! Amen.