



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Philippians 4:6-7

“Christian Contentment, or Doxology in Desolation”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading today is two relatively short verses from Philippians chapter 4. So if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Philippians 4, and we'll read beginning at verse 6 through verse 7.

The apostle has just said, “The Lord is at hand. Let your moderation be known unto all men,” and now writing from a Roman prison or confinement, he says,

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through, (the original text has ‘in’) in Christ Jesus.”

The magnificent expression by the apostle out of some very difficult circumstances, but something that most of us at one time or another in our Christian life have learned to lean upon with great force. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for the blessings of life. We thank Thee for the physical blessings and the material blessings. We thank Thee for the rain

that has come. We praise Thee that we have the confidence that Thou wilt continue to govern and deal with Thy creation in such a way that Thy name shall be honored and glorified through it. We look about us and we see the inevitable signs of the deity and power of our great God. And we thank Thee, Lord, for the seasons of the sprinkles from heaven that mean so much to us in a physical way. Even more significant, we thank Thee for the sprinkling of the grace of God that has brought to us an eternal salvation through our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

And today, as we think of the blessings of our great God in heaven we think of our savior standing for us on Golgotha, crying out in those last words of his to express for us what was truly happening when he gave himself up to eternal punishment that we might be free. We thank Thee for the salvation we possess, we thank Thee for the blessings of life, we thank Thee for the confidence of the presence of God in our lives. We thank thee for our Lord's gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers in him. When we think of the Lord being near we realize that even more than the common sense of the term “near” he is with us at all times.

We thank Thee for the church of Jesus Christ today for all who have, by God's marvelous grace, been brought to the knowledge of the Son of God. We recognize Lord we belong to Thee, all of us, and we belong to one another. And we pray that Thou alt give us the spiritual understanding and the spiritual responsiveness to realize that great fact. We thank Thee for this assembly of believers, of friends who are here, and the visitors. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon them. Upon the ministry of this church we ask, Lord, Thy blessing. We look back over the past thirty years or so and we thank Thee for Thy blessing upon us. Thou hast truly been good to us.

We pray that we may be pleasing to Thee in the preaching of the message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, both individually and as members of this body of believers. We pray for the outreach of the chapel, its radio ministry, its tape ministry, the publications that from time to time go forth, and the Christian testimony of the believers.

We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon all of these things, glorify Thy name through them. And we pray for our sick, the ones who have called upon us to join with them in supplication, that God will minister to them in their needs. We bring them all before Thee, and others too who may desire prayer who have not mentioned this to the chapel itself. We bring them all to Thee. We thank Thee for the providence of God that governs all of our steps.

And we pray for our country. We ask Thy blessing upon our President and in these important days strengthen him, give him wisdom and guidance and may the decisions that are made in Moscow be decisions that are significant and good for the United States of America and for Russia and for others who may be involved. We thank Thee now for this time together. We pray Thy blessing upon us as we sing, as we give attention to the word of God. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today is “Christian Contentment, or Doxology in Desolation.” And, of course, the doxology comes from the lips of the Apostle Paul and the desolation is the condition of the apostle at the time he writes these marvelous words.

Our day is characterized by many things, but one of the things that characterize our day is stress, strain, anxiety, and fear. Anxiety, our text is translated often, “Be anxious for nothing.” The Authorized Version has, “Be careful for nothing.” But the term that is used is a term that suggests anxiety, “Be anxious for nothing.” Anxious is a term derived from the Latin word “angustia” which means narrowness, constriction. And so consequently it suggests the feeling that we often have in times of stress in which physically we feel the constriction about our throats and the word is related to that very fact.

It's not uncommon at all for individuals to feel stress. I'm sure if we had a show of hands all of you would raise your hand. You've felt stress, you've felt strain, you've felt anxiety. And no doubt, you would, if you were honest with yourselves, you would say, “I have also felt fear.” A few years back a poll was taken among young people and

the question that was asked them was, “What did they feel toward life itself, what is your basic feeling.” Sixty percent of the young people said that their basic feeling toward life could be summed up by one word, fear. And I would imagine that that is true today, that many of our young people when they think of life -- I’m not talking about Christian young people, just young people, the Christians are a vast minority, of course, -- would acknowledge that their feeling, too, is fear. We do not have the same sense of the purpose of life, the gaining of a right relationship with God. The Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, was filled with the anxiety of guilt and guilt in the presence of the divine judge. And that guilt brought from the heart of Luther the question, “How can I find a gracious God?” That’s not the question that troubles the heart of our shallow generation today. The question that would take the place of that would be, “How can I be delivered from the anxiety and the fear of life itself that characterizes my life?” In other words, where once there stood the God who would ultimately judge all men, there now is a vacuum. Our world has lost the sense of the Lord God.

As a matter of fact, when we set out on our Christian pathway we do not really know much about ourselves. And the longer we live in the Christian pathway the more we learn about ourselves. I read a story of a sculptor who was working on a piece of marble and someone came by and said to him, “What are you doing?” He said, “Well I’m chipping away everything that does not look like a horse.” [Laughter] And when I think of human beings I think of the experiences of human beings and the experiences of Christians particularly. That’s what is happening in their life in the light of the fact that we have a divine sculptor in heaven, that he is chipping away everything that does not look like an individual conformable to our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

The Christian gospel specializes in dealing with man’s sin and unbelief and guilt. It comes as a surprise to many to study the Scriptures in the light of anxiety and fear and stress to discover that the Christian gospel also claims to deal with anxiety. For example, the apostle told Timothy that God has given us the spirit of a sound mind. Now that

word is a word that means self-discipline but one of the most fundamental facts of self discipline is to have a sound mind. And so consequently one of the things promised by the word of God is the promise of a deliverance from anxiety. In other words, we should have the sanity of saintliness as a result of the provision that God has made through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The believing church today is relatively sure of the first aspect of the effects of the gospel. That is, that through Christ we are delivered from sin and guilt. But it's unsure of the latter. And the fact that it is unsure of the latter is made public and evangelized by the tremendous ministry that has been given by Christian people to the psychology and psychiatrists of our day who claim to be Christian psychologists and Christian psychiatrists. In fact, we could include the non-Christians as well. So yielding to the bewitching siren song of psychology, swallowing vast quantities of tranquilizers, we've often surrendered in the church of Jesus Christ the sense of the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus for our spiritual life and the sufficiency of holy Scripture for spiritual life. And in fact, in the words of some which have often startled me, what we need to do in the Christian life is to turn our Christian life over to, quote, “the professionals”, unquote. The professionals.

Some time ago I read in one of Martin Lloyd-Jones's chapters in one of his books that the great problem of life in a sense is how to lay oneself down to rest and sleep. And then he cited the psalmist who said, “I laid me down and slept.” And then Mr. Jones, or Dr. Jones said, “Anybody can lie down, but the question is can you sleep?” That really is a question. All of us have been lying upon our beds and hoping that we might be able to go to sleep because we're troubled by something that has been happening in our lives.

As I look at the New Testament I am also cognizant of the fact that the Lord Jesus often spoke to his disciples in the terms of, “Fear not.” You look at the New Testament gospels, for example, and many times we have, “Fear not,” from our Lord. In other words, to be anxious, to be concerned, to be full of stress, is something that the Lord

Jesus and the ministry that he has accomplished, the ministry of the triune God, is designed to eradicate in our lives.

I want to say that the beginning of my thought with reference to the passage today is not something original with me. I was reading a chapter in a book by a man whose writings I often read and find them very edifying in a Christian way. And this man went on to say that he had just recently attended a showing of chrysanthemums and he said in discussing it that he had not been particularly fond in his life of flower shows, but he had gone to this show of chrysanthemums and he had been impressed by the certain flaunting abandon about chrysanthemums that one does not find in other flowers. These waving tassels of white and purple and gold are very attractive and the penetrating perfume is almost overpowering, he said. And yet with all of their obvious bravery he said there's something indescribably sad about those gorgeous blossoms. They are autumn visitors, he pointed out. He went on to say that a man whom he knows had written about the flowers that are very common in our lives, narcissus or the daffodil, the rose, and then the chrysanthemum, and that in a sense they illustrate the passage of our lives.

In the spring of our life is the time of the daffodils and you and I know that in the spring, as a matter of fact even before spring comes, the daffodils began to put their little shoots up. I haven't specialized in gardening but that's one thing I do have a number of. I have about five hundred daffodils; that is, I have five hundred that have been planted in my garden [Laughter]. And I've ordered another over a hundred again for this year to fill in the places where my parts of my five hundred plus did not come up. I love daffodils, love to see them come in February and bloom so vigorously and impressively. And then in the central part of our year: the rose. The rose suggests maturity and power and the beautiful roses are really sights to behold. I've never been able to grow them. Black spot or whatever it is seems to overcome all of my roses, but I love to look at the others who are able to grow them and to smell the fragrance of the blossoms. And then in the fall and amidst the frosts there appear the beautiful chrysanthemums. And so in a sense we

have the beginning of life, the maturity of life, the strong time of life, and the chrysanthemums, the fall, the frosts and ultimately, of course, the death of the flowers.

I know I am in the chrysanthemum period of my life and there are others of you in this audience as well who know that. This individual said he went home from seeing the flower show and he did something I love to do in the winter time, it's one of my great regrets about Texas. Texas has one or one-and-a-half too many months of heat and therefore one or one-and-a-half too few months of nice, cold weather. Nothing I like more, I don't guess, than sitting in front of a fire and just dreaming. Well my friend went home from the chrysanthemum show and he said that he sat down before his fire with his Bible in his hand. He said he was captivated by Paul's words, "Be careful for nothing." And he said he must have dozed off because as he was in his sleep or dozing he saw a garden, it was overgrown with weeds, and then there stood before him the gardener who turned out to be the Master, capitalized, the Lord. And in his hand the Master held three rare and radiant chrysanthemums. They formed, he said, a perfect rout of floral glory. He talked about it, talked about the fragrance of them, and the Master said to him, "Grow chrysanthemums like these and I will bring you the seed of the sweetest heartsease with which to make a border round the bed." Now if you're like I am, I did not know exactly what heartsease was so I looked it up and it's just a little flower very much like a pansy and makes a beautiful little border. So, "If you grow chrysanthemums like this in the midst of the garden I will fill it with heartsease round about. I'll give you the rarest heartsease for a border, the piece of God that passes all understanding."

Well that started me thinking about this text and he said some other things about it which were very good too, and my own thoughts were strengthened from what I read because, you see, what is happening here is a man who is in the period of life in which his life may be called a chrysanthemum period. The Apostle Paul is in a Roman prison. He not only is in a Roman prison, of course, but he is there as an individual who is in tattering health. How old he was, I don't know. Scholars sometimes say he was still in

his fifties but he was a man who had spent his life in such a way that no doubt he looked older than he really was. But it's possible he was in his sixties. At any rate, he was in tattering health. The hopes that he had to visit the West far away no doubt were a bit shattered because there was no certainty at all that he would escape with his life from the imprisonment. And so his hopes are almost shattered, his plans are thwarted, his prospects do not look very good. But yet, in the midst of it he writes this marvelous little letter, a chrysanthemum letter, in which he says, “Rejoice in the Lord: and again I say, rejoice.”

What a magnificent testimony to the significance of the ministry of the Lord God in the heart of a man who has experienced the stress and strain of Christian ministry. So we want to look at it for a few moments and I hope that our comments and our study of it will be of help to all of us. You'll notice the 5th verse states, “Let your moderation, let your yieldedness, be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.” And what follows is an inference from that. In other words, gentle yieldedness in matters of person interest, but firmness in principle. Paul the apostle was never the kind of man who said that we ought to abandon principle in order to be yielded to our friends' needs or requirements but to let your gentle yieldedness exist because he is near.

Now I don't know and I don't imagine any New Testament scholar would want to stake his life on the sense of the meaning of that expression, “The Lord is near,” because it's obvious that the Lord is near in the lives of Christians because all Christians are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. So he's always near. But on the other hand, that expression is often associated with the second coming of our Lord. And in the context just preceding in verses 20 and 21 of chapter 3, that is specifically set forth by the apostle, he says, “Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.” So I'm not going to tell you which it is because I don't know, but I do know this: that whether it's his coming or whether it's his presence, nevertheless the inference from it is a justifiable inference. He says, “Be anxious for nothing.” This is the

imperative of unconcern. It's a negative prohibition, a command, “Be anxious for nothing.”

Now that interests me quite a bit because you might think that what he's saying is to repress your feelings of anxiety and be anxious for nothing. But that's not really Paul's point. So far as I know, the New Testament does not support the idea of repression. In other words, we don't fight hard to repress the thoughts that come to our sinful minds. And I mean minds affected by sin. As long as we are in the flesh we are touched by the principle of sin within our members. And I would suggest to you that the reason the apostle says, “Be anxious for nothing,” is not because he's telling them to repress those feelings that are there, but he's telling them that there is good theological reason for this prohibition. And I'd suggest to you that the good theological reason that the apostle would have his readers think about is the good theological reason of the providence of God.

In other words, all of these Philippian believers were individuals who believed in the sovereign providence of the Lord God. And consequently to be anxious for nothing is not grounded in our repression of ourselves but it's grounded in the providence of God. That is that God is the one who foresees all things that may come into our lives because Scripture tells us he has foreordained them. He works all things according to the counsel of his own will and so consequently the experiences that you and I have are not surprising to the Lord God. He doesn't look down from heaven when you fall sick and say, “Oh, Lewis is sick today. I think I'll have to strengthen him a little bit in his inner man.” No, no, what a little view of God we have if that comes into our minds. No, no, this is all in accordance with God's great plan for us and for his whole creation which is brought into being. And so what is back of this, “Be anxious for nothing,” is the conviction of the sovereign providence of the Lord God. And ignorance of the providence of God, my Christian friend, is the reason for the impatience that so often characterizes us. We forget that the things that have come to us, have come to us from

the hand of a merciful, loving God, it may not seem to be good, it may be very disappointing to us, they may produce a good deal of anxiety in us before we reflect upon what God is, our God is, who he is and what he is able to do and who we are and how dependent we are upon him.

So be anxious for nothing. This is not simply the Apostle Paul as if Paul is out on a limb here and the apostles would say, “Paul, you’re taking it a little too far.” As far as I’m concerned, Peter might be saying, “I go to Dr. So-and-So when I have some mental problems.” No, it’s not that at all. What Paul is deriving is simply things that come from the Lord himself. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon,” and he tells us in this verse that we are slaves, we are servants. That’s what we are. All Christians would acknowledge they are servants of God. But then he says, “Therefore, therefore, because you are a servant of God; therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life,” don’t be anxious about your life, “What ye shall eat, what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.” Don’t be disturbed if you can’t ride around in a little red car like so many of our people in Dallas are doing these days. Have you ever noticed that? Those little red cars, it’s amazing. Martha and I have noticed that every time we see one, there goes another little red car. Mercedes, BMWs, etcetera, don’t worry about that. You’re not going to have one in heaven either. I’m not going to say that. You don’t want one. I mean, we don’t need one. I don’t say we don’t want one [Laughter].

So our Lord says, “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?” Look, this sense of understanding that underneath the life of the believer is the sovereign providence of God originates from holy Scripture is affirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ, is proclaimed by the apostles, and is the reason why we can have the experience of being anxious for nothing.

Now having said that Paul says in verse 6, “But in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” Isn’t it marvelous to have those little words like “but”? “Be anxious for nothing; but.” There is one thing we are to be involved in, diligently, “But in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” We’re not talking about passiveness, we’re talking about responsibility, we’re talking about the sovereignty of God as well and they all mesh so beautifully in holy Scripture, so the adversative “but”. I don’t go out and relax, throw up a hammock, lie in it, I’m anxious for nothing. No, no, in everything. Notice the all inclusive, positive, answers exactly to the all inclusive negative. “Be anxious for nothing; but in every thing, (don’t be anxious about anything, but in everything,) let your requests be made known to God.” We do have trials. But nothing is too great for his power or too small for his care.

We live in the days when the Christian life is regarded as the life of happiness and joy. And there is happiness and joy. I don’t say I would not want to denigrate that at all, I have never been as happy in my life as I have been as a Christian. Rolling in long puts over the green and shooting sub par golf rounds gave me some happiness at one time. But today I confess that kind of happiness cannot compare with the happiness that comes from the right relationship with the Lord God. The Christian life is not all enjoyment. The health, wealth, and success gospel has been having a field day but now the wages are being paid and it’s not good. And many of you in this audience -- maybe I shouldn’t say that in Believers Chapel -- some of you in this audience no doubt has spent your time before the television tube and you’ve listened to what has been portrayed as being true Christianity and now we are discovering the shallowness of much that passes as true Christianity. I wish I could say, “Look at me,” I cannot say that. But I know that that is not what the apostles talk about. Purveyors of that kind of gospel looked the part. They have the little red cars, they have the beautiful houses, they also have the lawyers now, or

after them. And the genuine Christians, well, they're looking a little bit better as the days go by and they'll look a whole lot better in the future.

So Paul says, “In every thing by prayer and supplication.” I'll not try to talk about the difference between these words, that would be too tedious for us at the moment, but you can sense the different ways in which we may pray, prayer, supplication, “And let your requests be made known unto God with thanksgiving.” Prayer, supplication, thanksgiving is the submissiveness of the Christian life. If we pray we're being submissive, if we are supplicating the Lord God, we are in a submissive relationship to the Lord God. And if we are giving thanks, we are in a submissive relationship to him. Those very words suggest the relationship of submissiveness. And if we don't have anything to think about that we can be thankful for, just think and be thankful of the access that we have, that we're able to pray, that we're able to supplicate God and that we're able to send requests heavenward and accompany them with thanksgiving.

If you want to see how this is carried out in our Lord's life, think of our Lord on Calvary's cross. If there was ever any anxiety our Lord must have felt it then. “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” But wait a minute, even in the midst of the greatest of the experiences of the Son of God, it's not, “Oh God, oh God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” but, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” Even in the midst of the desolation of the cross he's a believing Son of God. A trusting Son of God.

And not only that, but he even expresses his prayers and his trust in the language of holy Scripture. “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” The very words of Psalm 22, verse 1, so he reaches back into the Old Testament, takes a text out of the Old Testament, offers it up as a petition, for this was the moment of which that text ultimately spoke. And in the midst of desolation it's characterized by confident trust in the sovereign providence in the Lord God.

If you need another illustration, I don't think most of you do, but if you do need another one when our Lord was in Jerusalem near the end of his days there came some

Greeks who had heard about him and had evidently wanted to see him. There were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast and so they came to Philip of Galilee and they said, ‘Sir, we would see Jesus.’ Now the Lord Jesus had said in John chapter 10, “Other people I have which of not of this fold: them also I must bring.” The beginning announcement of the transformation of the thrust of the gospel, not simply to the Jews but to the gentiles, and ultimately Paul would be appointed as the apostle of the gentiles. So the flow of the divine program is coming to a significant turning point. And our Lord recognizes that and when he hears that Greeks, gentiles, are now seeking after him that’s very significant for him, and so he says, “The hour has come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die abideth alone but if it die, bringeth forth much fruit.” He sees what now is approaching him as being very near. And so as the God-man is in Gethsemane, “Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not my will but Thine be done.” And so now he says, “Now is my soul troubled.” Troubled because he was going to die physically? No, no, troubled because he would die spiritually. Spiritually, that’s the fundamental death, spiritual death; separation from the Father under the pangs of the broken law for all men of all kinds, Jews and gentiles. Sufficient for all.

So what does he do? “Now is my soul troubled and what shall I say? Father, Father, Father save me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name.” So as Paul says, “Be anxious for nothing; but in every thing, (even in the suffering of the cross, in everything,) let your requests be made known unto God through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.”

“Every misery we haven’t got,” Guy King once said, “Is a mercy we have got.” So we have plenty of things to pray about; not only the things that we have but the things that we have not got. Those miseries that have passed us by in the sovereign providence of God, thank God for them too. They are his purpose for your life. “Be made known unto God,” isn’t that interesting? As if God needed information, as if God needed

information. One of the skeptics objection to prayer: “Why pray, God knows it all.” So the apostle calls upon them to enter into the relationship of communion and intercourse with the Lord God. Let him reconcile our prayer with his infinity. That’s his duty. We think we have reasons for reconciling them. But what he wants us to do is, a great theologian once said, is to unload into the bosom of God the cares that we do have. And the doors open for us to do just that.

And then the final point in the 7th verse, after the imperative of intercession, after the imperative of unconcern, is the divine sentry, and this is a great chapter for conjunctions. “Be anxious for nothing; but,” the adversative conjunction. “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” This is the important link, “And let your requests made known unto God.” “And,” inward security, a serenity is promised by the apostle, “And the peace of God,” the fruit of believing prayer. By the known presence of the God of peace.” He’s called the God of peace in verse 9, “And the God of peace shall be with you.” So the peace of God shall garrison your hearts. That word garrison is the word that was used for the guarding of a besieged citadel or the sentries who watched through the night in case the army might be attacked. So the sentry of the human heart is the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Now when he says, “The peace of God passes all understanding,” I understand that because it’s very difficult to understand why it is that many great Christian people, ones we don’t know about and ones we do know about, in the greatest experiences of life, experienced serenity. Think of those who hung on a stake and were burning to death and at the same time expressed not only thanksgiving to the Lord God but prayed for those who were responsible for their death. I think of the apostle himself, he’s in his last imprisonment and he writes a little note to Timothy, a marvelous little book, an epistle. But nevertheless, in it he says, “Timothy, try to come and be with me, and Timothy bring the books.” Even in the midst of his last days he’s still interested in the

books but then adds, “Especially the parchments.” Especially the parchments. Especially the word of God. Better than all the books you can think of. Think of William Tyndale in the same kind of circumstances at Vilvoorde. Just before he would ultimately be burned at the stake and in that prison he writes a little letter too and like Paul he requests some physical thing, “Bring a coat,” like Paul did. Bring a coat, because he faces a winter in prison so, “Bring a coat that I may be warm,” and then Tyndale said, “And don’t, by any means, forget my Hebrew Bible.” Theological students could never understand that.

Jim Rayburn who started Young Life as they split from another youth organization said when he graduated from Dallas Seminary he’d use his Hebrew Bible to use his door open, as a doorstop. Well you can see that Mr. Rayburn [ph46:12] was not very much of a scholar. And out of the sense of the kind of thing that dominated the apostle and Tyndale and the reason we hear of those great men is partially explained by the experiences that they experienced. The peace of God, some people think of that like a kind of, as a friend of mine whose writings I’ve read for a long time, said, “Like a spiritual marshmallow, the peach of God.” Soft, sweet, peace of God.

The New Testament talks about the peace of God not as something soft and sweet only, but talks about the peace of God as the result of the shedding of the blood of Calvary’s cross. That peace of God is something that cost, is something that has to do with the doctrine of reconciliation. How enemies have now, by God’s marvelous grace in Christ, become the friends of God. So the peace of God. It’s the peace that the Lord Jesus talks about in the Upper Room Discourse when speaking to his apostles about the future, he said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, (they give softness and sweetness), give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” And he appeared to them after his resurrection and we read, he said, “Peace be unto you.” That’s not simply a greeting, mind you, for he said it again. “Peace be unto you.” He said it once, a verse or two later he says it again. He’s talking about the results of the saving work that has been accomplished on Calvary’s

cross. It was a greeting but it was a greeting in the sense of the finished atoning work that our Lord had accomplished. And it passes all understanding for the simple reason that the worldly individual could never understand the peace of God that characterizes a Christian.

Junior Matier [ph48:26] has written a little commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians. And I was reading in it a few days ago and in it he talks about the fact that the peace that Christians have passes all understanding. He said the world can never understand that and then he cited the instance of a Christian woman who an obituary was written concerning – and in the obituary it was stated her hobby was religion. Just like taking up fishing, so religion. Or golf, so religion. Lewis Johnson used to have golf as his hobby and now he has religion for his hobby. The world doesn't understand, the world never understands. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them, for they're spiritually discerned.” That Christian woman's hobby was not religion, it was her life. It was the fundamental plank upon which she lived, the truth of God.

So Paul says that the peace of God that passes all understanding shall keep, shall garrison, like a sentry, like a besieged citadel, your hearts and minds because, listen, we cannot keep our hearts and minds from activity. It'd be nice if you could say, “I will not hear such thoughts again,” but you cannot do that. God simply promises the peace of God will garrison our hearts and minds, and incidentally the heart includes everything of the inner world of our being, our understanding, our worlds, our affections, and his peace is that which shields us from things that would be dishonoring to the Lord God. He is an infallible safekeeping God by virtue of the supernatural peace that he gives to Christian men and women.

The real problem of life is how to control our hearts and minds and here is the answer that is given to us. “The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep, (shall keep, shall keep,) your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Well we do live in

the age of anxiety and often face it still dragging along with us the luggage of the past, our sin of unbelief. The serpent's still active. His fangs, however, have been wrenched out and the victory has been won. And the accomplishment of it awaits the future. One of the significant things about Christians is the difference that exists between them and others. Go to the catacombs and notice the inscriptions that the unsaved have written and then go and look at the inscriptions of the Christians.

Let me give you some examples. On the pagan inscriptions: “To the unrighteous gods who robbed me of my life,” an inscription in the catacombs. Or, “Our hope was in our boy, now all is ashes and lamentation.” Or, “I Procope lift up my hands against the gods who took me hence undeserving.” That's the word. Now the Christians: “Torentiana lives,” is the inscription. “Agape, thou shalt live forever,” the inscription of a Christian. “Marcus, innocent boy, thou art among the innocent now.” What a difference.

Actually, in the experiences of life Christians triumph. Matthias Claudius was a German exhorter and one of his statements has always impressed me and I have received a great deal of comfort from it. He said, “He that will not believe in Christ must see to it how he can get along without him. As for you and me, we cannot. We need someone who will lift and hold us up when we are alive and he will lay his hand beneath our heads when we must die (time of the chrysanthemums in life) when we must die, and then (notice these marvelous words) and this he can do abundantly according to what is written about him and we know of nobody whom we'd rather do it.” I hope on my deathbed, and it's probably not too far away, I hope on my deathbed I will have enough of my senses left spiritually to have the spirit of Matthias Claudius's words. I know of nobody I'd rather commit my life into than into the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I think it was a very important man, his name escapes me right now, that's proof the day is coming soon [Laughter], was talking about some Christians who were meeting together and talking about their favorite places in the word of God, the greatest passages. And one of them said well as far as I'm concerned (the individual is Daniel Webster)

someone has said the finest passage in the Bible is the creation story. Another argued for the Sermon on the Mount and still another for the description of the redeemed in the Book of Revelation. But Daniel Webster slowly quoted these exquisite verses from one of the minor prophets, Habakkuk. “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive shall fail, (in case you have any problem with identifying you people in Dallas in the economic recession of our days, with real estate and banking and energy, just put yourself there if you like. I know you don’t like it, but if you do,) the flock shall be cut off from the fold and there shall be no herd in the stalls. Yet,” Habakkuk says, “I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

“I’m amazed,” Mr. Webster said, “that no talented artist has seen there a subject for a masterpiece. The Prophet Habakkuk sitting in the midst of his dreadful desolation, still praising God and rejoicing in his unseen savior. Habakkuk, careful for nothing. A friend says he was growing chrysanthemums, just like Paul. Rejoice in the Lord again, I say, rejoice.

We do have to make it personal, don’t we. Have we? Have we really reached the stage where when we face the experiences of life and we can say, “Lord, I’m not going to be concerned about this. I want to keep petitioning you for relief and deliverance. I count on the peace of God that passes understanding, garrisoning my heart and my mind from the trials of life.”

Luther said faith is the right use of the personal pronoun. May God help us to make the right use. If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, oh what you are missing. Oh what you’re missing in having a God who has saved sinners by his work on Calvary’s cross and who also guarantees by the authority vested in him, all authority, that he will take care of all of the experiences of your life. He will garrison your heart and with his peace and glorify himself in your life. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Trust in him. Receive the forgiveness of sins and the promise of his saving presence in your life now and forever. Don’t leave the auditorium with out the

“Christian Contentment, or Doxology in Desolation” by S. Lewis Johnson
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assurance of a relationship to him. It's very simple. Bow your head, give thanks for what Christ has done for sinners. Acknowledge you're a sinner, receive as a free gift not by works, by not by joining a church, not by observing the ordinances, not by your religion, not by your education, not by anything else. But acknowledge you're helpless and hopeless apart from Christ, and then trust in him. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for these magnificent words from the apostle. Spoken in the maturity of his life, in the midst of great outward appearing trials but nevertheless grown chrysanthemums...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]