**Philippians 4:4-9**

**Responding to the Coronavirus**

March 15, 2020

David Taylor

Big Idea: Paul describes three way we should respond to life’s problems.

Today I want us to consider how we should respond to the Coronavirus or any crisis. Christians are not strangers to plagues, epidemics or mass hysteria. One of the driving forces behind the church’s explosive growth in its early years was how Christians responded to suffering, disease and death. Between 249-262 AD Western Civilization was devastated by one of the deadliest pandemics in history. At its height, five thousand people a day were dying in Rome. The response of non-Christians was self-protection and self-preservation as they pushed sufferers away and fled from those they loved, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treating unburied corpses as dirt, hoping to stop the spread of the disease. But the Christian response was the opposite. Christians ignored the danger, took charge of the sick, cared for them and died with them as they became infected and joyfully accepted suffering and death. It was this that shook the Roman Empire and gives us an example to follow. Whatever crisis or difficulty you face today, whether it is the Coronavirus or some other issue, Paul has advice for us in Philippians 4:4-9.

1. **Find Joy in Jesus Christ (4:4)**

Paul starts this section by telling the Philippians to stand firm in the Lord, that is, to remain steadfast, to stand strong, to be faithful to him in the midst of their difficulties. The first way they are to stand firms is to rejoice in the Lord (4; see also 3:1). Life’s difficulties rob us of the joy we find in Jesus. George Mueller said that the first great and primary business of every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord because we don’t always wake up ready to sing. Rejoicing in the Lord is to find joy or happiness in the only lasting source of joy, Jesus Christ. Most people think you get joy *when you get what you desire*. But real joy comes when you realize *what you deserve*. You and I deserve judgment and what we receive instead is salvation. That should lead us to great joy. Life is not about getting what you want; it’s about being grateful for all that you have in Christ Jesus. He goes on, rejoice in the Lord always, that is, do not let circumstances rob you of your joy in Jesus. Suffering and pain and crisis often leads to tears but Paul tells us that sorrow can be mingled with joy (2 Cor 6:10). So, the first way God calls us respond to the Coronavirus is to press into Jesus for joy amidst the hysteria and the doom and gloom.

1. **Have a Gracious Reputation (5)**

Next he tells us to let your reasonableness be known to everyone (5). The word for reasonableness means gentle forbearance toward others, not being contentious. It is being gracious under pressure or toward difficult people. Be known to everyone means that you have a reputation for being gracious, it characterizes your life. When the pressures of life are upon you or you are surrounded with difficult people, are you gracious?

The foundation for both joy and graciousness is that the Lord is near. This could refer to the Lord’s return or the Lord’s presence. That is, Jesus is returning so live graciously towards others or Jesus is there for you, to help you be gracious. I think it is both. Christ’s return should motivate us to live differently today and Christ’s presence should motivate us to call on Him to help us deal with difficult people or difficult circumstances. So, the second way God calls us to respond to the Coronavirus is to have a gracious testimony because you are not caught up in the fear and hysteria of the media.

1. **Put Your Trust in God (6-7)**

The writer of Proverbs says, anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down (12:25). Anxiety is like carrying a backpack full of rocks for miles. You may question whether you can really overcome anxiety through prayer and experience God’s peace? The answer is yes. Fear or worry leads to anxiety when we imagine the future in a terrible way. John Piper says, anxiety seems to be an intense desire for something, accompanied by a fear of the consequences of not receiving it.

Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God (6). Do not be anxious, do not worry, or do not fear. He is talking about a concern that starts with some thought in the mind that you imagine has negative consequences for you that then give rise to fearful emotions which results in anxiety or stress that affects your body in some way. This happens because we are carrying the weight and concern of a possible negative future, whether that is perceived or real, on our shoulders that then suck away our joy and peace. In contrast to this he says, but in everything, in every circumstance in life, take your concerns to God in prayer. Instead of carrying the weight of your concerns, instead of being fearful or anxious about your circumstances, turn these concerns over to God in prayer because God’s shoulders are infinitely wide to carry them. Don’t carry that heavy backpack that God is meant to carry. Give your concerns to God.

Finally, God promises that if you will give him your concerns, the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (7). This peace finds its source in God so is beyond human understanding. It is a supernatural, Spirit given, calm that you have despite difficult or negative circumstances. Because it is God’s peace, it guards both your heart and our mind like a soldier guards a prisoner. God’s peace guards our hearts from troubling emotions and guards our minds from troubling or run away thoughts. When we turn our concerns over to God, our circumstances cannot rob you of God’s peace or joy. This peace is promised to those who are in Christ, who are connected to Jesus by faith. So, the third way God calls us to respond to the Coronavirus is to turn your concerns over to God in prayer.

**Life Group Questions:**

1. What do you know about the Coronavirus?
2. What are your concerns about the Coronavirus?
3. What are the ways Paul tells us to respond to any crisis?
4. What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord? How is that done?
5. Are there things in your life that causes you to fear, worry or be anxious about?
6. How does Paul say praying alleviates worry?
7. What is the peace of God described here?
8. How is making our prayer known to God result in us having God’s peace?
9. What does God’s peace do for us? What does this mean for us?
10. How is this message speaking to me?
11. How does this message help me in making disciples?