

Peace, Perfect Peace

by Gareth Evans

The sermon teaches that true peace comes from being anxious for nothing, prayerful in everything, and thankful for anything, while recognizing God's presence in our lives.

Duration: 17:05

Scripture: Psalm 46:10, Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 6:33, John 14:27, Philippians 4:6-9

Topics: "Peace"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of seeing the good work that God is doing in people's lives, even if they may not fit the traditional mold of church attendance or Bible study. The speaker shares the inspiring story of Michelle, who plays an instrument called Congers, and highlights how her miraculous recovery from a coma after a traffic accident is a testament to God's work. The speaker encourages believers to have a gentle and moderate spirit, treating others with understanding and looking beyond surface judgments. The sermon also emphasizes the need for rejoicing and prayerfulness, even in difficult circumstances, as exemplified by the apostle Paul's words from prison.

Transcript

The front line of battle, pray for the pastor and his wife that are on the front line of the battle. I don't understand that, I really don't. But I tell you right now, as a pastor, I can spend all my time in my study, reading the word of God, in prayer, spending time with God.

In the battle, I have all the luxuries that can be afforded me to enable me to spend time to get close to God. It's some of you people on the front line in your workplace are the ones who need the prayers and comfort of God's people. My job is to maintain the home base, where I, when you come in on a Sunday, on a weekend, where I come to feed you from God's table, I pray to encourage you so when you leave here, you feel more equipped for the battle that's going to go on from Monday to Friday.

My job is to look after the armory, so that you can take upon yourself the armor of God. That's my job, my job's an easy job. I'm not in the front line of the battle, you're in the front line of the battle.

And we need to see one another and begin to understand that there are so many people, even in this room, who are right in the battle day by day. And when we look at them, we should not be looking at them with the eyes of saying, oh, well, they're not regular in church, they're not into Bible study. We've got all these surface reasons that we can judge one another.

Instead of beginning to see the good work that God is doing, the exciting work that God is doing. I'll give you a little illustration that thrills me, that thrills me every time. Are John and Michelle here this morning? Where are John and Michelle? John, where's Michelle this morning, John? She's at home.

Okay, some of you have noticed Michelle coming up here and playing these, I keep calling them bong bongs, they're not bong bongs, what are they called? Congas! And Michelle just stands there. And somebody did not know Michelle would say, well, she's not doing much. But if you know the story of Michelle's miracle, of how God saved her through a long coma after a terrible traffic accident, your heart would be thrilled to say, look what God is doing.

She's looking at 50% marks, but I tell you, as far as I'm concerned, she's a 100% girl. That is what this word means. Let your moderation, your gentle spirit, treat one another with eyes that see beyond the present into the deeper circumstances of the life.

So Paul says, rejoice. Again, I say to rejoice. Let your moderation be known to all.

Let men see in you a man, a woman, who sees the deeper truths of what God is doing in the life of a person. The Lord is near. He's talking in prison.

This man is in prison. And he says, rejoice, rejoice! Let your moderation known, because the Lord is right here near. It's the Lord who's doing the work.

And then comes this little simple formula. Be anxious for nothing. Be prayerful in everything.

And be thankful for anything. Anxious in nothing, prayerful in everything, thankful for anything. In 1989, Anne and I took a party of nine people to Mexico on a missions outreach.

We spent most of that time in the city of Guadalajara, which is to the north of Mexico City. We worked in an orphanage. It was a wonderful time.

Then we had to return to Mexico City four days before we were due to fly back to Canada. In Guadalajara, we had bought ourselves a beautiful leather bag, traveling bag. Leather is one of those commodities you can buy very cheaply.

And it's a very, very beautiful material from Mexico. And in that bag, we'd put all the other trinkets we had bought. I don't know if you've ever been to Mexico, but you could buy leather belts very cheaply, and the paper mache dolls, which will cost you \$60 in Canada and for \$3 in Mexico.

We bought all these lovely things, bring them back. Got on the bus to travel back to Mexico City, four or five hour journey back to Mexico City. And we put all the cases for our team underneath the bus, except this leather bag went on the rack above us in the bus.

When we got to the northern terminal in Mexico City, there are three major terminals for the buses with a million people at each. When we got to the terminal, I got out straight away to make sure that all the bags came off safely from underneath the bus. And I'm counting all the bags and the cases as they come out for our team.

And then Ann said, oh, the black bag is in the bus. So I went back in the bus, and there was no black bag. And so my Mexican friend, Francisco and I go run around the bus station to try to find this bag.

Went to the police station at the bus terminus, and the policeman went, oh, sir, this is Mexico. What's the policeman said to me? You expect to find a bag, sir? While we are running around, Francisco and I, like chickens with our heads cut off, Ann has got the rest of the team, all girls, women, with her, and she said, well, let's pray. And so they're praying.

Now, Ann has made this verse her motto. This is her key verse, has been ever since she married me. Be anxious for nothing, be prayerful for everything, be thankful for anything.

And so she says to these young girls, younger, not young girls, young women, so let's pray. And she says, we need to be thankful, because God knows where the case of that bag is. Let's thank him, even for the circumstance.

So she prayed to them, saying, Lord, you know where this bag is. And though we're a little anxious, we thank you that you are the Prince of Peace, and we ask you to be with the bag wherever it is, and if it's been stolen, that somehow, Lord, even through this, you will be witness to whoever's stolen it. This is how she prayed to the amazement of these girls.

When I come back, I say, the police can't help us, and she then comes up to me, she said, I just realized while we were praying that all the team's money is in the bag, many hundreds of dollars, and our passports are in the bag as well. So the next morning, or maybe that same evening, I called the British Embassy, I would travel on my British passport, so we called the British Embassy there in Mexico City, and I said, day after tomorrow, I have to fly back to Canada, and I've lost my passport. Can you help me get back to Canada? And they said to me, well, you come in to our office tomorrow morning, bring in four photographs, passport photographs, and we'll give you an emergency passport to get you back to Canada.

So next morning, Francisco and I go into the embassy, and I'm filling out the form, declaring what I'd lost, et cetera, and then the woman said to me, excuse me, sir, are you Mr. Evans? I said, yes. Oh, she said, are you Reverend Evans? Because at that time, on my passport, it said Reverend Evans. I said, yes.

Oh, sir, a woman has just telephoned in, she's found your passports in Toluca. Toluca is 70 kilometers south of Mexico City. We've come from the north side of Mexico City.

Mexico City is the biggest city in the world, so between the Northern Terminal and the Toluca Terminal is an entire city, and our passports were found 70 miles south of Mexico City. She said, she's coming into Mexico tomorrow, she will have your passports tomorrow. She said, oh, wonderful.

She's coming at nine o'clock. So at half past eight, we went into the office the next day, because I wanted to greet this woman, to thank her for finding our passports. When we got into the office, the woman said, oh, she said, she's already been here, and she's left this for you.

And she went back and she brought our bag. And we opened the bag, and not one single thing, not one dollar note was missing from that purse, that bag. And on top was a little letter that said, Dear Reverend Evans, please pray for me.

Dr. Antonia, whatever it was. Now, I assume, I do not know, that she took her bag, or somebody did, and she found the bag, went to Toluca, opened it up, and found my passport, which said, Reverend Gareth Evans, and being a good, superstitious Catholic lady, decided not to steal a bag belonging to a priest, and returned it to me. I tell you the story, because it is a remarkable, I think it's a remarkable story, but I want to

tell you that my wife thanked God for that situation, and we believe it's an answer to prayer, as receiving a bag back.

I can tell you many, many stories of that nature, but the promise of God's word, the prescription of God's word, is that when we learn, when we learn to be anxious for nothing, as Jesus told us to, to be prayerful in everything, and to be thankful for anything, then the promise is that the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Is it a fixed formula? No, it is not. But it is a discipling process that God wants us to learn through.

I'm so delighted while we're here. We have made so many wonderful friends among you, and you've hosted us to your homes, so many. I was at a home this week, and the first words that we sat down to the table, that my host dad said to me, tell me some more stories.

I tell a lot of stories. I assure you they're all 100% true. But I tell the stories because God has done so many amazing things in our life.

And I think a lot of it is because of my wife's understanding of this principle she learned from her father. Her father was a very sick man. Anne spent all her teen years looking after her father.

Her mother was deaf, so Anne would often stay right by her father's bed all night because if he started crying out in his sleep, or morning, she would be there, the mother would not hear him. So they learned to go through a great deal of struggling, but they learned not to be anxious in anything, to be prayerful in everything, and thankful even for those circumstances. And God came through in amazing ways.

So for you who are struggling with a need for peace, I present to you that formula. When I was a young Christian, there was a book that came out, it was very popular at the time, by a man called Merlin Carruthers. Merlin Carruthers was a chaplain in the American forces.

And the first book he wrote was called Prison to Praise. And his whole premise as he dealt with people in the forces was that they came to him with all their problems, he said, well, let's now thank God for this problem. And men in the reactor, how can we thank God for this? My husband is leaving me, how can I thank God for this? And Merlin's principle was always to take him to the scripture, let us thank God for this situation because God wants to do something.

And the miracles that turned out of that thankful attitude to circumstances that were far from circumstances you and I want. And it's a wonderful book of testimonies. My first principle, my first formula, my first prescription to you is be anxious in nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.

And the peace of God which passes all comprehension, this is not a peace that can be rationalized, not a peace that can be understood, this is a peace as Jesus declared that the world cannot give you, nor can it take it away. Peace of God. But then there are those times when the turmoil is not outside, the stormy season, the circumstances, not external ones, but they're internal ones.

Inner turmoil due to lack of self-esteem or feelings of inferiority or rejection or guilt or insecurity. And Paul continues this portion in Philippians, there from his prison cell in speaking concerning those lack of peace situations. Verse eight, finally brethren, whatever is true, true as opposed to those things that are flippant and casual and illusions, those oases and illusions we build around ourselves, those castles we build in the air, those things that are true, whatever is honorable, the word honorable means worthy, it's not a

flippant thing, not sordid, not dirty, worthy of God, it's not cheap.

Whatever things are honorable, whatever things are right, and this word right means in a sense of duty to God and to fellow man, not the easy way out of circumstances, but doing that which is right, it means integrity. Whatever is pure, not dirty, sordid. Whatever is lovely, meaning attractive, that which draws us to God, something that is attractive, bringing forth love from others and from love for God.

Whatever is of good repute, fit for God to hear. When I was a young Christian, one of the things I was challenged with, would you do this, would you say this if you knew that Jesus was standing by your side? Would you go to that place if Jesus, could you take Jesus into that place with you? And it's all these things that Paul is writing, and he says of all these things, think on these things, dwell on these things, meditate on these things. I think we as Western Christians do not understand fully the privilege we have and the blessing we have in meditation, we think of meditation as being an Eastern mystical thing, but it's Christian meditation.

And one of the reasons I enjoy worship is that I do not come to worship to sing songs, when I talk worship as we have it presented here in the church, I love to sing the songs, but I prefer to see those words and to make those words something that my heart wants to respond to. As we sing about his majesty and his glory and the things that God does, I hope my heart responds that because I want to meditate and think on those things. I remember our first years of marriage, Anna and myself, I got a posting to teach in Germany with the British Army.

We had a little house, an apartment, a flat away from the school, I was five years younger than any other teacher, so I didn't even relate to my colleagues on staff, I was nearer the age of my students than I was to the other staff members. Because we spoke no German, the family we lived with, a German-speaking family, and so it was just Anna and myself and one little baby girl, that's all we had at that time, and we were by ourselves, we couldn't go to a local church, we didn't know any English-speaking churches, it took us about three or four months to find an English-speaking church, and so we just spent all our time listening to Christian records, we didn't have tape players in those days either, not like today, cassette players, and just reading the Bible, and we meditated and read, and we fed ourselves, we didn't have a church, we didn't have a pastor to go to. I wonder oftentimes how many Christians would exist if they didn't have a church where they could go and be fed.

We should be able to feed ourselves in the Word, meditate on the Word, meditate upon the glory of God, fall in love with Him as you think upon Him. The worshiping attitude of the person who even in the midst of their vacuuming the house, washing the dishes, digging the garden, repairing the car, can still have a worshiping attitude as they think upon the greatness of our Savior. Paul says, all these things are there for us to do, as we meditate upon Him, as we think of Him, as we understand Him, and we as young Christians, we are forced into that situation, we cannot lean on anybody else, and so Oswald Chambers' book probably was the one we were reading at the time, and every day we read a portion and became meat to our souls as we fed upon those things, meditation, and Paul says these things.

He says, these things that you have learned and received and heard, and even those things this morning you hear from me, and over the last six months that I have been with you, I've taught many things. In our Sunday, adult Sunday school class, I've taught many things, I've learned many things, and I would like to be able to say, as Paul says, those things you have heard and seen even in me, I trust in some way I've been an example and a witness. Meditate on those things.

Hunger for those things, long for those things, because the result of doing so is this, and the God of peace will be with you. You do not meditate for the benefit of your mind. You do not even meditate for the benefit of your soul, but part of the formula, the prescription is that as you do this, the God of peace will make himself known to you.

Of course he's there, he's always promised to be there, but Paul is saying that as you do this, the God of peace will enter into the turmoil that is your lack of peace and make himself known to you. So this morning, if you've come and there are things that are pressing in on you, circumstance from outside, attitudes and feelings from within, I want to suggest to you this morning that the God of peace, the Prince of peace, wants to make himself known. You know, peace is not simply the absence of trouble.

Peace is knowing the presence of God, the Prince of peace. May that be true for each one of us in this church. For his name's sake, amen.

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