

# **St Martins C3 – July 24, 2022**

## **A life worth living – Stand Strong**

### **Sermon Summary:**

As New Zealand becomes increasingly secular in its values and outlook, Christians will face increasing pressure to compromise their allegiance to Christ and His ways. We need to be prepared for that challenge. We need to stand strong in our allegiance to Christ, while still showing God's love to the world around us.

We need to keep in mind that this pressure from the world around us is nothing new. The Apostle Paul encourages the church at Philippi to stand strong in the face of this pressure and his advice to them is good advice for us today.

### **Read: Philippians 4: 6-9**

**When life is lived in right relationship with God, we can expect an empowerment from Him to help us navigate the various life challenges the world throws at us.**

When challenges come, our natural default is to worry and fret. However, there is no need for us to fear, because God is in control. Therefore, the best response for us to choose is prayer rather than fear.

Prayer re-engages our trust in God. Prayer opens our minds and hearts to hear from God. Naturally we default to fear when challenges come, but when we pray, we will discover God's perspective, which will move us away from fear and towards His peace.

God grants us a peace that is beyond what we can generate with our self-talk. It is a supernatural peace that can only come from the Prince of Peace. It's the sustaining assurance that God is in control. It's a peace that protects our minds from running off into tangents of fear. With God's help, we will be able to resist the temptation to fear and move forwards with confidence.

Paul also reminds us that Godly thinking is needed to support the peace that God has given. A renewed mind supports a renewed heart. Therefore, keep your mind on whatever is noble, right, pure and lovely. Keep your mind on what God has spoken, not on what might or might not happen.

### **Read: Philippians 4:9-13**

Paul now shifts his focus from encouraging them to stand strong within the culture they are in, to thanking them for caring for Him. Even though these concluding remarks are more personal in nature, Paul makes two more important points, that go with what he has said previously.

#### **1) When we live for Christ, we not only receive His peace, we will also enjoy contentment.**

When our hearts and minds learn that God can be trusted and is in control, the drive for more dissolves and the appreciation of what we already have increases.

#### **2) God empowers or strengthens those who trust Him.**

Therefore, stand strong in your allegiance to Christ, as He is the one who will empower you to face challenges that will come your way.

## **Suggested Questions for Connect Groups:**

*What do you expect will be some of the challenges the church in NZ will face in the coming years, given our move towards becoming more secular as a nation?*

*What concerns you about those challenges?*

**Read: Philippians 4:6-13**

*Why ought we be not fearful or anxious?*

*What difference does prayer make for you?*

*Why does Paul tell us to be careful with what we are thinking about?*

*Why is discontentment a problem and contentment so good?*

*Where do you need God's strength and wisdom in your life at the moment?*

# Monday's Devotion – The dangers of fear.

## Philippians 4:6-13

For this week's devotions we are going to explore the passage we unpacked on Sunday in a little more detail.

The first thing Paul encourages us to do in this passage is to not be anxious about anything. Paul is referring here to that inner churning in our minds of "what if" scenarios. So, why is fear, anxiety or worry so bad?

Not only is there increasing awareness of the physical and mental effects of anxiety in our lives, but it is also spiritually detrimental. When we choose fear, we are choosing to not trust in God. When we live in fear we live in the enemies territory. Satan uses fear to derail us from putting our trust in God. So, when we choose to respond with fear or worry, we are giving permission for Satan to mess with our heads. Be aware then, fear is dangerous.

Another important thing to keep in mind regarding anxiety and fear is that through your worry and mental churning, you are trying to control a situation you have limited control over. If you can control it, then do what you can do. If you can't, then, leave it up to God. As Jesus said, "who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matt 6:27) If worrying doesn't achieve anything, stop it!

Faith builds a strength to pursue God's purposes, fear builds a bondage of restriction and inactivity. Let us be aware of the dangers of fear and put our faith in God and His promises to us.

## Tuesday's Devotion – Prayer and Peace

### Philippians 4:6-7

We approach God with thanksgiving. This is our way of acknowledging that we are truly dependent on Him.

In this context of honour and worship we present, or submit, our needs, or requests, to God. As we do this a number of things happen:

- 1) We are seeking agreement with God as to how His Kingdom is to be present here on earth. When we agree with God, it is powerful. Miracles happen. So, let's spend some time seeking that place of agreement with our Father.
- 2) We are letting go of controlling the situation ourselves and allowing God to move in the situation.
- 3) We gain a broader perspective on what is going on. Many times we have agendas in mind and timeframes in which we believe these agendas must happen. However, we don't see the big picture that God sees. It is in prayer that we receive God's perspective and the truth of what is really going on.

Verse seven assures us that God's peace accompanies heartfelt prayers. A peace where we know in the depths of our being that "God has got this," is what our hearts truly long for. A mind that is at peace is a truly healthy mind.

We need to also keep in mind that God's peace transcends what we can manufacture ourselves and protects our hearts from ongoing turmoil. Wow, prayer not only includes God in our lives, it changes the state of our minds and hearts. – Let's pray!

## Wednesday's Devotion – Godly thinking

### Philippians 4:8

*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.*

In the book, *“Telling yourself the truth,”* by William Backus and Marie Chapien, they write: *“It is not events either past or present which make us feel the way we feel, but our interpretation of those events. Our feelings are not caused by the circumstances of our long-lost childhood or the circumstances of the present. Our feelings are caused by what we tell ourselves about our circumstances, whether in words or in attitudes. If you tell yourself untruths or lies, you will believe untruths and lies. That’s why your beliefs and misbeliefs are the most important factors of your mental and emotional health.”* Backus and Chapien are both Christian counsellors and reflecting on the need for our minds to dwell on what God has revealed to be true. As we do that, we grow into the person God has called us to be.

We have a choice as to what we think about. We can think about all that is good and comes from God, or we can think about how life isn't going the way we want it to go. Thoughts which are of God lead our minds into freedom and life. Thoughts which are not of God lead to despair and bondage.

Let us then, not only bring everything to God in prayer, but continue to remind ourselves of the truth that God has spoken in our hearts. The truth that sets us free.

## Thursday's Devotion – Contentment

### Philippians 4:11-12

*I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*

There ought to be a natural progression from having the peace of God in our hearts and minds to a contented perspective on life. When we know in the depths of our being that God is truly in control, then we see everything we have as a gift, not something we are entitled to.

Notice that Paul said that he learnt contentment. Paul learnt that whether he had plenty or whether he was in need, he still had enough to live and to do God's will. When we stop and think about it, that is all we need as well. Contentment is something we need to teach our mind to embrace. Where we look at what we have been given and appreciate it, rather than looking for more.

The world will always push the lie our way, that if we have more we will be happier. But, the happiest people in the world are not the wealthiest people, they are the ones who are content. The truth is, it is nice to have nice stuff, but the nice stuff is not where we ought to put our confidence. Our confidence is in trusting in what God will give us and being good stewards of that. Then, we won't feel the need to hoard what we have, but to generously share it with those in need around us.

## Friday's Devotion – God's strength

### Philippians 4:13

*I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

One of the greatest mistakes I see most Christians make is seeking to do themselves that which can only be done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God designed us to work WITH Him, not apart from Him. When we acknowledge our need for Him and allow Him to work in our lives, the power of God is released in us. A power beyond what we could ever generate ourselves. A power that achieves more than we would ever achieve. A power that is available to the humble.

Paul is reflecting back on his life and realises that when he was relying on himself it really wasn't achieving that much. At the time, he thought it was, but in reality, it counted for nothing, because it wasn't serving God's life purpose for him.

God empowers us with His strength, not to give us what we want, but to serve Him and His purposes. The more Paul relied on God and serving His purposes, the more of God's strength he accessed. Until he gets to the end of his life with unflinching faith to tackle anything that God leads Him to do. Knowing that God's strength will be available for Him.

*Is your reliance on God and empowerment from Him increasing as you mature?*