

## October 30, 2016 Sermon Notes “Peace in a Turbulent Time” Philippians 4:1-9

Bob Dylan’s lyrics years ago, framed the culture shift almost like the Flood of Noah, sweeping away the old order to make way for new things. “*The times, they are a changin’.*” The difference between modern life and other times and places that hits you right away is how unstable everything is. Stability is very hard to find in our lives today. One of the few things that you can be sure of is that there are few things that you can be sure of.

Now a physical fact. If you want to navigate a vessel in a highly unstable environment, with lots of turbulence, the vessel has to have strong stabilizers within. Airplanes have stabilizers to counteract the turbulence that comes in the air and the more turbulence in the external environment, the stronger and more effective the stabilizers in or on the vessel have to be.

There has never been a place, other than modern, western, secular societies where you and I need strong effective internal stabilizers. Today you and I have to think about the big questions of life, which means as we face this world we’ve got to have incredibly effective internal stabilizers. Maybe my problem is not the fact that I live in the year 2016. Maybe my problem is not the circumstances. Maybe the problem is that I’m an airplane without any rear fins. I don’t have any stabilizers. Paul had them.

And you see that in verse 1. He says, “Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, this is how you should be firm in the Lord.”

Paul was like that. Wave after wave after wave. Turbulence and more turbulence. Pressure and more pressure. He was a like a rock. He stood firm. He never wavered. Why? He tells you here. This is how you can stand firm, he tells you. If you look at the passage you’ll see, first of all he lays down a principle and then he lays down a practice.

1) First he lays down a basic principle for stability,

2) and then he gives you a three-fold method for applying that principle.

1. First of all, the principle the Bible uses for dealing with pressure and turbulence and change is this: You use big truth in little places. You go to the little and mundane circumstances and you always, always, see those things in the context of the whole sweep of eternity and all the big issues. You use big truth on little spots. You use cosmic truths on mundane circumstances.

Notice how Paul turns to the issue of disagreement with people in a church. Look carefully. First of all, he says, “That is how you stand firm.” But notice. He is referring to 3:20ff. What do you see in those verses? It is cosmic stuff. He says, “We are citizens of heaven.” Then he says, “Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be transformed to be like his glorious body.”

Now, do you see what he is doing? Paul cannot deal with even with even the smallest problem, with even the most mundane situation, without putting it into the context of all of redemptive history. He cannot do it. He will not do it. He always brings the whole of eternity in—the entire sweep of theology to bear on anything and on everything. Do you see? What is he doing with Euodia and Syntyche? What is he doing? He says, “Remember these things. Remember.”

2. In this passage Paul gives us three methods. I’m going to call them three disciplines and I’m actually going to give them to you in a kind of order. Each one is a little bit harder than the others and they build upon each other.

a) There is the discipline of prayer. In prayer you see your circumstances differently because you see through the wisdom of God. Well then, let me ask you how you pray, because if you look carefully Paul doesn’t just say ‘pray.’ He is enjoining a particular kind of prayer. “Pray with thanks—Make your petitions.” You have to envision all the possible things that could happen and thank God for all of them ahead

of time. Every time you are suffering, any time anything is going wrong, you insist on seeing it through the cross.

b) There's the discipline of forbearance. The discipline allows you to live differently in the midst of your circumstances through the grace of God.

Paul is saying in the midst of the Philippians present adversity, the Lord, to whom they belong, has graciously set them free for joy—always. At the same time, because of this, others should know them for their “gentle forbearance” toward one another and toward all, including those who are currently making life miserable. Your life can be characterized by a radical gentle forbearance if you allow the grace of God to fill your heart and to direct your heart—to guide its thinking and emotions and ultimately how you live.

c) Then there's the discipline of the presence of God. The discipline of the presence of the Father overwhelms your circumstances with the peace of God.

Do you notice in v. 7 it says, “If you do these things the peace of God which transcends all understanding will keep (or guard) your hearts and minds”? Yet, if you go down to the bottom of v. 9 it says, “The God of peace will keep you or be with you.” That's is very intentional. Do you know that if you only seek the blessings of God but not God you won't get the blessings of God? As C. S. Lewis puts it: “Aim at heaven, you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth you get neither.” If you follow these disciplines—if you seek Him and His presence, not just His blessings, you will experience an overwhelming peace that just transcends your circumstances. It transcends everything.

Listen. If we do this we, as a church, will have a stability that can and will deal with any turbulence that life brings our way in any of our relationships and, indeed, corporately as the Body of Christ.