

12.22.2024 Advent 4 (Philippians 4:4-7)

Over the years I've started to read, but failed to complete, several daily devotionals by a number of different authors. Most of these devotionals manage to keep my attention for a month, or two, or three, but as time marches on they all seem to fall into the same pattern of spending more and more time on the shelf, instead of in my hands. However, there is one book, other than the Bible, that I've read on a daily basis for many years, and still today continue to find new wisdom and insight contained in its pages.

The writer who has captured my attention, every day, for years is Oswald Chambers, and his work, *My Utmost for His Highest*, was actually compiled by his wife after he passed away from a pulmonary hemorrhage at the age of 43. His life was relatively short, and he died more than 100 years ago, but Oswald Chambers' example of faith, obedience, and authentic Christian discipleship has inspired millions of Christians in their walk with the Lord, and his writings continue to make a powerful impact for the kingdom of God by encouraging his readers to be their "utmost for His highest," by working and praying and giving of themselves completely in order to be absolutely and entirely for God, and for Him alone.

In one of the most compelling passages found in his devotional, Oswald Chambers makes this statement, "There is only one relationship that matters, and that is your personal relationship to a personal Redeemer and Lord. Let everything else go, but maintain that at all costs, and God will fulfill His purpose through your life. One individual life may be of priceless value to God's purpose, and yours may be that life." This powerful statement came to mind when I was studying today's Epistle and read these verses in which St. Paul, writing as a prisoner, tells Christians, "*The Lord is near*" (Philippians 4:4 BSB). "*Do not be anxious about anything*" (4:5 ESV).

The words St. Paul used here, "*Do not be anxious...*" are an exact repetition of our Lord's command from the Sermon on the Mount to: "*Take no thought.*" Do not be anxious "*for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father*

feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matthew 6:25-26).

What we have so far is Oswald Chambers telling us to maintain our personal relationship with our personal Redeemer and Lord at all costs, but to “let everything else go.” St. Paul, who wrote to Christians, saying, “*Do not be anxious about anything,*” and Jesus saying, “*Take no thought for your life,*” what you will eat, drink, or wear. Now, in the case of our Lord, we might think, easy for you to say. After all, with the Father and the Spirit, He is the same God who provided the children of Israel with clothes and shoes that never wore out, water from the rock, and bread from heaven. At the marriage in Cana, He turned gallons of ordinary water into the most extraordinary wine, and in the deserted wilderness, multiplied loaves and fish to feed thousands. Jesus is both God and man, and therefore, as C.S. Lewis noted, “the perfect submission, the perfect suffering, the perfect death were not only easier to Jesus because He was God, but were possible only because He was God,” and this thought would also certainly apply to our Lord’s perfect ability to take no thought for His life.

The Son of God, the One who accomplished all things perfectly, now commands us to strive to follow His perfect example, to “*take no thought*” for our life, and when we consider who He is - fully God and fully man, we may be tempted to think His words are just some sort of lofty ideal, but remember, we’re speaking not only of His command, but the words of Oswald Chambers and St. Paul as well, and perfection was not an advantage possessed either of these men, yet they stated the same command, and Paul made that statement from prison.

“*The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything,*” wrote the man who was in prison waiting to receive his sentence. Would Paul once again be “*stripped and beaten with rods... severely flogged*” (Acts 16:23-24), or this time would the sentence be death? St. Paul, from an earthly perspective, had a multitude of reasons to be anxious about his life, far more than you or I, but he wasn’t, and therefore we can be sure that these words are not a lofty ideal, but instead, an actual directive, given by those who are intimately familiar with the many difficulties and dangers of this life.

“*Do not be anxious about anything...*” In this world it sounds like an

impossible command, but it's not, and the rest of this verse reveals the reason why. St. Paul's exhortation, in its entirety, states: "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Let me ask you, does a little child, who is in the care of good parents, have any reason to feel anxious? Do we, as beloved children of God, our perfect Heavenly Father, have any cause for anxiety? Certainly not, and St. Paul wants us to recognize this comforting truth, and so he moved directly from the command, *Do not be anxious about anything*, into a bold statement about the surpassing peace that is found when we trust God with *everything* through prayer. *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God*, or to use the thoughts of Oswald Chambers, "Let everything else go," but maintain your personal relationship with your personal Redeemer and Lord at all costs, "*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*"

This side of heaven it would seem we have only two options: We can either pray to our Father about everything, as St. Peter writes, "*casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you*" (1 Peter 5:7), or we can choose to look no further than ourselves, and end up being anxious about a great many things. These are the two options, and if we don't take one, we will certainly end up with the other, because as St. Augustine stated, "... our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

Our hearts will not remain empty. The human heart demands to be filled with something, and if our hearts are not filled with God through the intimacy of thankful prayer and supplication, then we will certainly have a heart full of ourselves, and all the anxiety this world has to offer. In this season, may we, by grace through faith, not only choose to welcome God into our hearts, but make a resolution to keep Him there, that He may guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, to the end that through Him we may joyfully live out the command: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything - pray.*