

April 4, 2020

Hello Brethren,

In Philippians 4:6 the Apostle Paul wrote *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”* This is good advice for us to remember, most especially at times like what we have now. We can always take every worry, concern, even niggling doubt to our Father in heaven, and ask for His help and His blessing on what we do.

In spite of our unusual circumstances, time continues to march right along. In fact, this is the last Sabbath Note I’ll have the opportunity to write to you before we all keep the Passover of 2020.

By now I would imagine we are completely done, or nearly so with deleavening our homes, vehicles and so forth. In our house we are nearly done, with the last few leavened items being restricted to a box on the kitchen counter. Whatever is not eaten before next Tuesday will be tossed out. One place we used to live had ducks and geese on a public small lake not far away. I think those birds really enjoyed the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because as a family we went over and fed them any bread we had left just before the beginning of the Feast!

This year has turned out to be very different from anything we could have imagined. It had honestly never occurred to me that we could face a situation where we would all be keeping the Passover “remotely together” like we will this year! But we are blessed to have access to a level of technology that will allow us to do so. I’m sure it won’t feel quite the same as when we can all be together, but we can still obey the command to keep the Passover, and to do so as a memorial of an event that makes life and a future possible for us and eventually all of mankind.

Preparation for the Passover is something we focus on every year – and rightly so! We are warned by the Apostle Paul that we must each examine ourselves before Passover (I Corinthians 11:28), and there is a judgement to be made against us if we don’t (verse 29)! That’s serious, so I trust every year we each make sure we take the time necessary with prayer, fasting and careful introspection to take stock of our personal spiritual state. It is important to do so before we renew our baptismal covenant with our Creator!

Satan always makes it easy for us to become distracted and not examine ourselves as carefully and completely as we ought, but this year it is even more so. I do not for a moment believe that the timing of this version of a coronavirus was just happenstance. Coming as it has during this critical time period leading up to the Passover has most likely been influenced as much as he could by our arch adversary. He works tirelessly to discourage, distract and dissuade you and me from living our calling as we should.

Fear may be one of the biggest potential distractions this year. There may be some degree of fear about the health of ourselves or our brethren and loved ones. The virus is real, and while the vast majority of those who contract it recover, it does create serious problems for some. And of course we see the death tolls on almost every news source, because it can be fatal, most often when combined with an already existing health condition. This is a genuine fear.

But we now also are seeing the direct effects of the virus and the entire world's reaction to it in the economies of virtually all nations. In the US it has been reported that last week alone a record 6.6 million people filed initial unemployment claims. This sharp rise is blamed on the response of business and industry to the pandemic. For example, earlier this week Air Canada laid off half of its entire workforce, amounting to 16,500 employees. This trend is being repeated with many companies. And sadly the number of small businesses that are closing entirely continues to rise. The longer this current climate remains, the greater will be the numbers of people who will lose their jobs.

This is going to affect us all in one way or another. It will almost certainly impact the income of the Church, and therefore will have some degree of impact on what we are able to do in terms of our two-fold commission of preaching the gospel to the world and caring for the flock called by God. That's something we should each be praying about!

Which brings me back to Philippians 4:6 which I quoted above. These fears and perhaps others too are things we need to deal with and work through in a right and proper manner. But many times that's a lot easier said than done, isn't it? So let's look just a couple of verses before this and notice something else Paul wrote. Verse 4 says *"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"*

Why does Paul focus on rejoicing immediately before telling us that we have someplace to go with our fears and anxieties? Notice what the NLJV Study Bible says of this verse: *"The joy of Christians is not based on agreeable circumstances, instead it is based on their relationship to God. Christians will face trouble in this world, but they should rejoice in the trials they face because they know God is using those situations to improve their character."*

I found that very thought-provoking. Joy is at the opposite end of the spectrum from fear and anxiety. As God's people, the joy we have in life isn't supposed to be only because we have pleasant circumstances – it must come from the solid, loving and sure relationship we have developed with our Creator! Knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is with us, and that we are what the Psalmist called "the apple of Your eye" (Psalm 17:8) is something that relieves us of fear, and brings real joy!

As we finish preparing for the Passover, I hope and pray we can overcome the distractions and even fears we may be facing in these unusual times. I hope and pray we can each learn to rejoice even in trials and difficult times, because we know God is using all these things to improve our character!

If all things technical go well, tomorrow morning at 9:30 am we'll begin webcasting services to you locally. I'm looking forward to being able to speak to you for the first time since the beginning of March!

Best regards,

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