

Saint Paul said, “...think about these things.”

On January 8th, 1815 the United States of America was invaded. Over 10,000 foreign soldiers and sailors anchored in the Gulf of Mexico disembarked and attacked American troops 30 miles east of New Orleans, Louisiana. Perhaps you have heard the song: *In 1814 we took a little trip along with Colonel Jackson down the mighty Mississip. We took along some bacon and we took along some beans and we fought the bloody British in the town of New Orleans.* No hard feelings with British folks today, but did you know that the Battle of New Orleans was fought 15 days after the war was over? The Treaty of Ghent was signed on December 24th, 1814 ending the War of 1812. The ship carrying the news of peace left London on January 2nd. But while it was still crossing the Atlantic, on January 8th the British troops attacked and were defeated. The war was over, but the battle was still being fought. I think that is a good analogy of the spiritual life.

As Christians we profess that Jesus Christ has conquered evil. The world gave Him a cross but God turned it into victory. Jesus said, “Because I live you also shall live.” We share in His victory. He is the way, the truth, and the life. His Holy Spirit empowers us to be His witnesses and to continue His ministry today, with the promise of life everlasting. Through Jesus Christ we have peace - peace with God, peace with one another, and peace which passes all understanding. Friends, the war is over. But isn't it true that there are still battles that we fight?

There are times when we struggle with temptations. There are times when we are attacked with subtle lies, negative thoughts, and destructive impulses. There are times when it seems that life itself has turned against us and we feel like we are being invaded from all sides. There is spiritual battlefield that takes place in our hearts and in our minds. And that is what we are going to talk about for a little while this morning.

In our passage of scripture, Saint Paul said to the Philippians: “...This is how we should stand firm in the Lord... 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 these things.”

It could be that Paul was addressing a very specific situation when he wrote these words.

In chapter 4:2 we are told that there were two women in the Church of Philippi (Euodia and Syntyche) who were not getting along. We are not told what the problem was, but it was obviously serious enough for Paul to mention them by name and to urge the Philippians to help these two women to be one in the Lord. Perhaps that is what was going on behind our passage of scripture this morning.

In her book entitled “Battlefield of the Mind,” Joyce Myers confessed that there was a time in her life when she believed that the source of her unhappiness was other people. It was always her husband’s fault, or her children’s fault, or someone at work or someone at church. *If they were different, or if only they would treat me differently, then I would be happy*, she thought. For years it was one thing after another. “I finally realized,” she said, “that it was my thoughts that were making me miserable.”

The thesis of her book is simple: “*Think about what you are thinking about.*” If our thoughts are consistently negative about others, then we are probably going to have conflict with others. But if you focus on positive things then you will be amazed at the difference it makes. Your homework assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to spend this next week thinking about what you are thinking.

In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul said: “**Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**” That is where the spiritual battle takes place. The world knows how to be negative, but don’t be conformed to that. In our passage this morning, Euodia and Syntyche knew how to have conflict, but don’t be conformed to that. Perhaps Paul is telling these two women, and the Philippians, and us to seek new and transformed minds.

On the other hand, I think it is more likely that Paul is speaking in general terms. Perhaps Paul is simply giving us random thoughts at the end of his letter. Paul may be sharing with us discoveries that he has made in his own spiritual journey.

Saint Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter. Forgive the understatement, but Roman prisons were not nice places. If anyone had the right to have negative thoughts, it would have been Paul. *This is no way for my life to end. I worked hard for the Lord and what did I get?*” It would be understandable if Paul had been angry, depressed, and bitter. But that that wasn’t the case.

In verse 4:4 Paul said: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” In verse 4:12 Paul says “I have learned the secret of how to be content in all circumstances... I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Given his situation and circumstance, how could Paul say such a thing?

James A. Kitchen, in his book entitled “Talking to Ducks”, said that there are two types of Joy. There is internal joy and external joy. External joy is what you feel when you are a kid on Christmas morning when you see all the presents under the tree. Internal joy is what you feel when you are a Christian on Christmas morning after the presents have been opened and you say “Happy Birthday Lord.” External joy will leave us when bad times come. Internal joy is a gift from God that preserves regardless of circumstances. That is the kind of joy that Paul had discovered.

That is the kind of joy that Henry Mitchell was talking about when he said: “There are no bad days. Oh, I’ve had sick days, and arthritis days, and bad hair days, but there are no bad days because joy is not contingent upon what the day may bring. Rather, joy comes from the One who brings the day.”

This morning Dave Sanderson spoke to us about our upcoming Stewardship Campaign. The theme this year is “Count yourself blessed.” If we count our blessings, do you think it will make a difference in the way that we live. If we stop and think about how blessed we are, do you think that it will make a difference in how we can be a blessing to others? Sure it will!

In our passage of scripture this morning Saint Paul said: **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”** Saint Paul said, “Do not be anxious...”

A couple of weeks ago I started looking for illustrations for this sermon. So, I sat down at my computer and I googled the word “FUD”. Are you familiar with this term? F.U.D. is a three letter acronym that stands for Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt. This term first originated in the business world. For example; if you sell soap it is not enough to tell people that your soap will clean their shirts. You have to first tell them about *ring around the collar*. Ring around the collar is on the inside of your shirt so no one will see it if you’ve got it and no one would care if you did. But that is not what advertisers want you to think. They want you to be afraid of ring around the collar. They want you to be uncertain that your own shirt is clean. They want you to doubt that there is any other soap on the market that can clean ring around the collar. That is FUD!

More recently this has been perfected by our politicians. It is no longer enough to say that if elected you will do good things. Now you have to create fear, uncertainty, and doubt about the other candidate. This week on the internet I found page after page after page of instructions on how to create fear. And I realized *we are being attacked - we are being bombed with FUD*.

Then latter that day I went home and turned on the news. This was a couple of weeks ago when the Stock Market was on a rollercoaster. Sometimes *FUD* is real. What do you do when we are being attacked by fear, uncertainty, and doubt? In our passage of scripture, Saint Paul is telling us to think about what we are thinking about, to focus on the things that are positive, and to rise above it.

In 1999, Britling Orbiter 3 became the first hot air balloon to non-stop circumnavigate the globe. I was mildly interested in the story at the time, but I became more interested when they crossed over the Middle East. Yemen, for example, did not allow them to cross over their military sights. If Orbiter 3 had entered Yemen air-space, they would have been shot down. So, they discussed it and they decided to turn and go around those countries. Here is my question: **How do you turn a hot air balloon?** They don’t have rudders. There is no steering wheel on a balloon. You can’t hit the blinker, stick your arm out the window, and make a left hand turn. How do you turn a hot air balloon? The answer is, they go up. A hot air balloon will go up until it hits a crosswind going in the right direction and it will carry them to their destination.

That is what Saint Paul wants us to do when we are being attacked by fear, uncertainty, and doubt. He wants us to go up to God in prayer. But you say: the things that we are

facing in our lives are real. Paul was in prison when he wrote this passage. He wants us to rise above the circumstances of our lives. Did you know that the word in the bible for Spirit and wind are one and the same? When we go up to God in prayer the Spirit will move us to God. With rejoicing and thanksgiving, we make our requests known to God.

Friends, Jesus Christ has won the victory. For you and me the war is over. We have peace with God and we know how the story ends. But there are still battles to be fought. When we are being spiritually attacked, Saint Paul said; “Think about these things.”

Whatever is true - if you can't sleep at night I suggest reading the bible. It doesn't get any truer than that. **Whatever is noble and whatever is right** – when we find ourselves surrounded by negative thoughts, or bitterness or conflict, rise above it. **Whatever is pure** – O.K., let's be honest and say that there are times when we think about things that are not pure. How do you control impure thoughts? My friend Vern Price said, “I can't control birds that fly over my head. But I can control whether they make a nest in my hair.” If you are having impure thoughts get it out of your hair and think about things that are pure. **Whatever is lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy** – Saint Paul said, “Think about these things and the peace of God will be with us.”