

WHAT COUNTS

Philippians 4:1-9

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Let's see what you remember.

The year is 1970.

- An earthquake kills 50,000 on May 31, 1970 in what country?
 - a. India
 - b. Brazil
 - c. Peru
 - d. Dominican Republic

Answer: c - On May 31, 1970, an earthquake kills more than 50,000 people in Peru.

- 1970 Superbowl. Who is the world champion football team in 1970?
 - a. Minnesota
 - b. Kansas City
 - c. Dallas Cowboys
 - d. San Francisco 49ers

Answer: b - Kansas City

I was 7 years old in 1970, so those are hard for me to remember. Let's move on to the 80's, where everything will be fresh on our minds.

- The Academy Award for Best Picture in 1980 goes to
 - a. Kramer vs. Kramer
 - b. The Rock that Ate Pittsburgh
 - c. On Golden Pond
 - d. The Elephant Man

Answer: a - Best Picture, Kramer vs. Kramer

Oh, I'll bet you'll get this one. Who won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1980 for developing methods to map the structure and function of DNA. Was it

- a. Paul Berg and others
- b. James W. Cronin and others
- c. Janice Brown and others
- d. George D. Snell and others

Who won the chemistry award?

Answer: a - Paul Berg and others

Oh, you didn't do so well again. Let's go to 1990.

- Which of these events did not happen in 1990?
 - a. South Africa frees Nelson Mandela
 - b. Iraqi troops invade Kuwait
 - c. East and West Germany are reunited
 - d. Duke reigns as NCAA basketball champion

Answer: d - UNLV defeats Duke 103-73.

Let's move to 2000.

- Which does not happen in 2000?
 - a. Kathie Lee Gifford calls it quits on "Live With Regis and Kathie Lee"
 - b. Oprah Winfrey debuts the *O Magazine*
 - c. Richard Hatch wins "Survivor"
 - d. Kenneth Lay resigns from Enron

Answer: d - It was 2002 when Ken Lay resigned from Enron.

Finally, 2010.

- The following new product is introduced.
 - a. iPad
 - b. Apple watch
 - c. DVD
 - d. Self-driving car

Answer: a - the iPad.

Well, perhaps you're amazed at how poorly you scored, but I only took you back to 1970. What if I took you back to the year 1500?

Or, what about 500 years from now? What will be remembered about the year 2022 in 2522? What will remain important?

Not a person's name in this room will be known by anyone. That's really highly likely. You and I will simply be forgotten forever. Can you even call your great-great grandparents by name? I can't.

Forgotten.

There probably won't be any books in 2522, but whatever form of media is present, a student will come across a piece entitled "The Most Important Events in the 20th and 21st Centuries." What will be on the list of the Top 2 things that shaped life today that are still important in 2522. What will make that list? What will be remembered? 9-11 and the Iraq War will be a blip on the screen in the grand scheme of things, sad to say. Wars seem so important when they are being fought, but once you step back 500 years, you even forget what they were about, and you realize nations have fought every day of human history.

If you don't think that we forget – even about wars – how about the Battle of Gettysburg? Thousands of tourists flock to this little Pennsylvania town every year. We remember Gettysburg mostly because of what Abraham Lincoln said there in his address some four months later. But what do tourists ask when they go to visit the battlefield?

Bob Kaylor was a historical interpreter at the Gettysburg battlefield for two summers when he was in college. Here are some of the questions people actually asked – these are real questions.

- Did the soldiers hide behind the monuments when they fought? (Of course, the monuments came many years later to commemorate the battle.)

- Where did the redcoats come from? (Uh, wrong war.)

- What was Lincoln's actual Gettysburg address? You mean he had a house here?

And the all-time favorite:

- Why were so many of these Civil War battles fought on National Park Service land?

So, in 2522, what are they going to remember?

James Trefil says it is new discoveries that stand the test of time. So he says that in 2522 what they are going to remember is man landing on the moon and the cracking of the genetic code. Those are the most important "current" events for future humans.

Well, Trefil may have it right. I'm not sure. He can't be sure. He'll never know. It will be 2522.

But what was important to Paul? What was worth remembering, according to the apostle?

Paul begins our passage today by declaring that the Philippians should "stand firm in the Lord."

Now, there is a fight going on between Euodia and Syntyche. We have no way of knowing what the squabble was about between these two church ladies. They were good ladies who had "shared in Paul's struggle in the cause of the gospel" (verse 3). Paul calls for them to leave the anxiousness about this little squabble behind and, in verse 4, to actually rejoice in the Lord always because (verse 5) the Lord is near.

"Don't worry about it" (verse 6). "Be anxious for nothing."

Be anxious for nothing, because as we pray to God (verse 6) we will receive the peace of God which is beyond the world's comprehension.

We worry about so many things that really make absolutely no difference – things that certainly won't be remembered five years from now, much less 500 years from now.

How many shallow crises do we have?

Oh, it's a bad hair day. I've worked on my hair for over an hour and it just won't do what it's supposed to do.

Now, that's really something to let bad hair ruin your day?

Students, your parents may be angry with me on this one, but whether or not you make an 89 or a 91 on a semester grade. Do your best, and in the long scheme of things it's not going to make any difference.

College campus anxiety? A nationwide study by Boston University of 33,000 college students says the majority of college students say declining mental health has impeded their academic performance (*Brink*, 2/17/2021)

Or, you already have one black sweater but it's not just the right one for the new jeans for the big date. So you're going to dedicate a whole afternoon Saturday shopping to be sure you get a black sweater that is better than the black sweater you already have – which neither your date nor anyone in the world will even notice that you've invested five hours and \$100 to make the change.

What Paul is saying to Euodia and Syntyche is that their argument is not even worth mentioning, much less remembering.

And it's not just our students who fret. We all worry. Worry about things that don't matter.

You have a fender bender in the parking lot. It's inconvenient. It will cost you. But it's really only plastic, metal, and rubber. And there are guys who can fix it to look better than new.

Our worries are so silly.

I came across the Roanoke, Virginia, *Times* from Monday, September 20, 2004. This newspaper article pictures a lady outside of her home. She lives on Bullitt Avenue, which is under construction. The story below the caption says she's pregnant, and she's worrying about the effect of the sound from distant jackhammers on her unborn child. What's funny about the picture is this pregnant woman is smoking a cigarette while she is concerned about the sounds of the distant jackhammers on her unborn child. Hello! Her worries, like ours, are so silly.

And you've never seen someone worrying until you've had to perform weddings. And there is someone at the wedding called The Mother of the Bride (the MOB). She can be a nasty monster. She has dreamed that the day will be perfect for her little princess, and anything at the church or

anything with the caterer or anything with the photographer or anything with the band – anything with anybody that is not perfect, because they’ve already spent too much – all of a sudden it’s as if the whole wedding hinges upon the fact that the shade of the napkins is just a hair off the shade of the table cloth. And what on earth, what on earth will the friends think?

Oh, brother. A year from now you won’t remember that the gold on the table cloth had more umber in it than did the gold on the napkins.

We waste our lives on so much meaninglessness. And, hey, I am offender number one.

There are some people we call worrywarts. They are always dwelling on one worry or another, big or small. In fact, they are not comfortable if they do not have something or someone to worry about. And if there is not anything to worry about, they’ll make up something to worry about.

The Germanic root for “worry” is “to strangle.” Our worry strangles us.

Most of the things we worry about never materialize whatsoever. Worry saps your energy, robs your mind of creative thoughts, and leaves you in a state of paranoia.

Robert L. Leahy, Ph.D., director of the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy in New York City and author of *The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You*, says that worriers have the misguided idea that because they worry they are going to be prepared for the worst. But he said that’s like saying, “The best thing I can do for the future is to make myself depressed today.” (Kim Acosta, “What, You Worry?” *The Challenge*, Sept 2005)

The best thing I can do for the future is to imagine the worst possible scenario in the future and make myself miserable today.

We worry about our health. We worry about our careers. We worry about finances. We worry about our future. We worry about our kids, our relatives. We worry about life in general. We worry about what other people think about us. And now we even worry about what other people think about us worrying.

Now, think about that one for a while.

- 1. Worriers believe they have no control over their life and its outcomes.**
- 2. They tend to be pessimistic and negative.**
- 3. They feel like they’re victims, and life is picking on them.**
- 4. They don’t believe they have any positive options for events or circumstances.**
- 5. And worriers don’t live in the today. They live in the future or in the past.**

In ancient hieroglyphics, worry is depicted – even in ancient civilizations they realized – as a wolf sinking his teeth into the neck of a man. In other words, worry literally cuts off the flow of life from the brain to the body and from the body back to the brain. (Tim Connor, “Are You Letting Your Worrying Kill You?” http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Tim_Connor)

Paul says to the church at Philippi, “Stop it. Be anxious for nothing.”

Paul wants them to focus on what counts.

Here is what matters for Paul. Here is what really counts for Paul. This is what will be important five years or five thousand years from now or 50,000 years from now. This is what will be important for all eternity – the story of Jesus.

For Paul, what really lasts is the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. The death and the resurrection of Jesus, for Paul, is the lynch pin of history, for it ushers in the new age and anticipates the fulfillment of that age to come.

Paul said all of human history will come to an endpoint, but not so with the Kingdom of God, which will go on forever.

When Paul is giving the history of who he is in chapter 3, he says that all that he is culminates in knowing Jesus. He gives us his resume in chapter 3. Look at verses 5-7.

“I was circumcised on the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.”

Rubbish (verse 8). Everything else is rubbish compared to gaining Christ.

What’s important to Paul? Look at verse 10: “That I may know Him.” What does Paul want? “The power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings” – careful, not an easy life – and “being conformed to His death.” Why? So that he may also be conformed to the resurrection from the dead.

Verse 14

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

What really matters is that our actions and our ideas mirror those of Christ. He finished chapter 3 by calling them to walk in a way worthy of those who follow the Christ (verse 16). Look at verse 20. “Our citizenship is in heaven, and we wait for the Lord Jesus Christ, who will give us a glorious body as we reign with Him.”

Stop worrying about insignificant things. Rather – look at Philippians 4:8 again – “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.”

Because we worship (verse 9) the God of peace who is with us.

The reality is that 110 years from now, everybody in this building will be dead. Gone.

The reality is that 200 years from now nobody will remember any of our names – not a one of us.

Your children do not know what Watergate was. The Reagan era means nothing to them. Half of them have never seen a record player in their lives.

You can build monuments and museums, but there is no way to call the generation of the future to remember the trivia of our lives, the dates and details of humanity.

You only have one opportunity to live life, one opportunity to make things count. Nobody is going to remember you. The only thing worth living for is the story of Jesus.

Every building standing today will be rubbish a thousand years from now. They will crumble under their own weight. It's inevitable.

But these things last. "Think about things that are true and honorable. What is right, pure. Lovely. What's of good repute."

Think of the story of Jesus.

Our lives on this earth are brief and historically without note. But we can follow the Christ, who is the ultimate note. We can live our lives and think about things and invest ourselves in things that will really matter in the long view of the Kingdom.

You know what? Human beings have short memories, but God doesn't. And what we do for God is the only thing that will be remembered or last.

You've stumbled on the truth today. Winston Churchill once said, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened."

The truth is your life is insignificant except for the portions that are dedicated to Christ and to His bride, the church.

Students, you are in a unique position, at your age, to give your life to things that count. Don't come to the end of the road – as many an old man and old woman do – to realize you've been chasing the wrong dream all along.

What really counts? The story of Jesus counts. Thus, the church counts. The rest is rubbish.