

The Peace of God 7-21-02

(Scripture references in yellow highlight will display the verse when you hold your cursor steady over them)

Over the last year many have found their retirement funds in the Stock Market have dwindled to a fraction of what they were. Every week brings a new terrorist warning. The budget deficit is on the rise again. College graduates are having a difficult time finding work. The Middle East seems ready to boil over at any moment. And then there is the nuclear threat in Pakistan and India. Added to the world's turmoil there is the turmoil in our own personal lives, finances, relationships, health, work, and on and on.

In times and situations like this how can a person have peace? Jesus told us that the world would continue in turmoil until His return, and yet He said He would give us His peace. What does that mean? Can we really have His peace in times like this?

During Jesus' last week, the disciples were in even more turmoil than we are today. Imagine how they felt with the presence of Roman soldiers everywhere. If the shouts about making Jesus a new king didn't put them in enough jeopardy already there were the threats from the religious establishment. They had been plotting to assassinate Jesus because He continued to expose their hypocrisy. When Jesus said He was going to Jerusalem, the very home of those leaders, one of the disciples said, "Let us go and die with Him." That had to be a time of real uncertainty. It wasn't as if Jesus told them things would be rosy. He predicted betrayal, torture, and finally His own execution at the hands of the Romans. I can't imagine a more frightening position to be in. We don't know the other details of their lives. Surely they, like us, had their own personal struggles and problems on top of their situation as Jesus' disciples.

It was in the midst of all this that Jesus uttered the words of John 14. *1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."* John 14:1 (NIV) He repeats the thought later in the same chapter. Verse 27 *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

Don't let, or allow, your hearts to be troubled. That must have seemed like an impossible command, yet it is the most frequent negative imperative of Jesus and the whole of the Bible. Do not be afraid. If frequency were importance then this would be the most important command. But how can you not be afraid, concerned, worried about the uncertainty of today or problems in your life? How could the disciples of Jesus' day obey that command? *"Don't let your hearts be troubled."* Jesus said that twice in this chapter. Don't allow yourself to become anxious – to have anxiety about the situation. Then He tells them how, *"Trust in God; trust also in me."*

Over the last few months we've looked at the wonderful attributes of God. We've seen how He is always good in all that He does. We've seen how Scripture declares Him to be unchangeable. We've looked at His mercy and graciousness, and we've seen that He is powerful enough to see that His plan comes to pass. He is Sovereign over all.

If I believe that He truly loves me and that He is all those things we have seen Scripture declare Him to be, then I should place my trust in Him. That is what Jesus said was the way to keep our hearts from being troubled. If I place my trust in the One who controls it all, the One who reigns supreme, and the One who I believe loves and values me like no one else possibly could, then I should be at peace. It doesn't mean that things will never be difficult, but that in the midst of whatever happens He is there seeing that His will is done for my good and His glory.

Let us get really practical and apply this kind of trust to a real life situation. Let's say you lose your job. That is happening to a lot of people. Polls have shown this to be the number one fear of married men. There is a God given concern that we supply the needs of those in our care. Jesus addressed that concern in Matthew 6. Your response to the loss of your job depends on where you trust has been placed. If you think your job was your provider, you should be very concerned. You will fear the lack of provision because that which you believed to put food on the table is no longer there. On the other hand if your faith is placed in the Provider who supplied the job and plans everyday of your life, the One who feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, you see it as a time of change to learn and to grow. God has always been faithful to see you through in the past. He will see you through this too. It may be more difficult than it has been, but this world is not your home. You trust God that He will give you what you need. He does meet it, and you thank Him for it. It may not be the abundance you were used to, or you may find your next employment makes you even more prosperous, but either way you survive and grow through it. God's goal is a matured saint not a pampered one.

The person whose eyes were on the world, on the physical, has cause to fear because the world is always in a state of flux. The person with their eyes on God need never fear because their strength and provision comes from an unchanging source. "Change and decay all around I see, Oh Thou who changest not abide with me." Since He is unchanging I need not fear. He has seen me through the trials of the past and He will see me through this also. I will not let my heart be troubled. Instead I will look forward to whatever God has in store for me, because I believe it is for my good. He's changing me into His likeness.

Our tendency to look to the world and physical provision to satisfy is easily proved to be based on a false assumption. If the material satisfied why are we one of the most dissatisfied nations in the world? If the material brought peace to the soul then why is the USA one of the most violent nations in the world? If material

possessions bring peace why is our rate of suicide so high in our nation and in our city. Don't believe the lie that making more money or having a better job will bring peace to your home. Peace does not come from the material world.

That does not mean you are not concerned about physical calamity. Hezekiah is called the greatest king of Judah. (2Kings 18:5) God allowed Assyria to conquer the fortified cities of Judah. Finally general Sennacherib led the Assyrian army to Jerusalem. He shouted to everyone in range of his voice that the God of Israel had let them down. No other god had withstood the Assyrian army and he vowed that their God wouldn't be able to help them either. Hezekiah tore his robe and put on sackcloth and went to the temple of God. Where you go when times get tough shows where you have really placed your trust. He sent his staff in sackcloth to see the prophet Isaiah. The sackcloth was a sign of humility. They recognized that God had allowed the enemy to bring them to this place of desperation, so they humbly sought God's guidance and direction. This is a realistic response to the terror of the moment. Hezekiah didn't just say, "Oh well, God is good and I'm sure everything will be fine." He humbled himself before the LORD and sought His guidance. (2Kings 19:1,2) You can read for yourself the wonderful answer from God through Isaiah in 2 Kings 19.

Trust in God; trust in Christ Jesus. If anyone else says, "Trust me!" RUN! If I say trust me – time to tell me goodbye. Man will change and will let you down. Jesus never changes. He is the only One we can trust. He is the One the Scripture says to fix our eyes upon. (Hebrews 12:3) He may not answer in the way that we hope, but He will always prove faithful. Looking back on my life I have numerous questions as to why this or that happened. Why didn't God answer this prayer or that? I remember a time in Hawaii trying to help a young man who was involved in a terrible crime. It was his first offense and he had followed the lead of two older men who got him caught up in it. This young man came to accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior. We prayed and prayed that somehow the judge would see fit to have him enter a Christian program where he could be disciplined. We claimed the promises of God as best we understood them. He was still sentenced to years in prison. I can't tell you why. God knows. He could not escape the consequence of his actions. God chose in His wisdom to not answer my prayers in the way I wanted them answered. I have to trust that God worked through the chaplain to disciple that young man and that somehow this was best for all concerned. Why? Because God is who He is. Because He is sovereign over all and will act in justice tempered with mercy out of His great love for man. He is good in all He does. In spite of my not understanding or thinking I know what is best, I know God is omniscient and I am not. I must do as Jesus told His disciples, "Trust in God; trust also in me." When I do that I place my faith alongside my fear and decide my faith in God will be my focus and my conviction, not the fear.

The Apostle Paul repeats the command of Jesus in his letter to the Philippians. Phil 4:6-7 (NIV) *6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition,*

Commented [Q1]: 5 Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. 2 Kings 18:5 (NIV)

Commented [Q2]: 1 When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD. 2 He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. 2 Kings 19:1-2 (NIV)

Commented [Q3]: 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Heb 12:2 (NIV)

with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Do not be full of anxiety about anything. There is a difficult if not impossible command. The only way we can do that is to truly trust in God. If we are not hearing from the God of creation we will fear what creation may bring into our lives in the future. But if we are listening to Him, walking with Him, we know we have nothing to fear. The peace of God is in our hearts. It is not your peace it is His peace. Consider the peace of God. He knows the future. He knows He is all-powerful. He knows nothing can shake Him or change His perfect nature. He knows His purposes will prevail. (Isaiah 55:11) The realization of that brings unshakable peace. That is what we need in the midst of trouble, His very own peace. You can't find that in the changing world. Money or houses or jobs or weapons or relations or anything in this world cannot give that to you. Those are all temporal passing things. You can only find it in the unchanging God of creation. No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace.

Commented [Q4]: 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
Isaiah 55:11 (NIV)

Look at what the Apostle said we should do instead of being anxious, *"but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."*

We lay it before the Lord. That is what Hezekiah did. He already knows all about it, but it really helps us to remind ourselves that He does. We pray and ask with thanksgiving. How can we be thankful in times of trouble? We are thankful because we remind ourselves of who God is and His promises to hear us in our time of need. The promise here is that the God of peace will be with us. That is in the following verses. (Philippians 4:9) He promises that His peace – the peace that is beyond all comprehension (literally in Greek – beyond the mind) will keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Isn't that what we need in the midst of trials? We need our heart to be kept in the peace of Jesus. When our hearts rely on the uncertainty of man they have reason to be full of anxiety. When they are kept by the peace of God in Jesus we have reason to trust. We are in His peace that goes beyond our understanding of the situation.

Commented [Q5]: 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.
Phil 4:9 (NIV)

Our heart is one thing and our mind is quite another. The promise is for our thought life too. Instead of dwelling on all the "what ifs", we think of all that God is. His peace helps our mind to stay in Jesus. He is the answer to all "what ifs". Do you remember the old song He's Got the Whole World in His Hands? Do you believe it? We used to sing a verse that said, "He's got me and my problems, In His hands." Do you know that is true? Once you do believe that you know they are not just your problems, they are your Father's problems too. He can handle them. We make such a mess of things when we try to handle things our own way. Trusting God changes your attitude and moves you from fear to faith. Trusting God enables you to wait for Him to do what He will in His time, or to act at His direction even when you would like to act in your own.

There is another type of fear that is very unspecific. It is a general anxiety experienced by those who have never entered into the peace of God. Augustine

wrote, "O Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." There is a restlessness that stems from our estrangement from God. When we are out of communion with our Creator, the Author of Life, we are disturbed by a restlessness of knowing we are not where we were created to be. Perhaps you sense this restlessness in your own heart. It keeps you awake at night and you've never been able to put your finger on it. I'll tell you what you've been avoiding hearing all these years. God made you for Himself. Until you surrender to His love you will never find real peace. Until you enter into the purpose for which you were created you will remain restless.

Charles Cowman went to Japan some eighty years ago as missionary. He took a megaphone and walked the streets of Tokyo shouting out in Japanese, "If you want to find peace, come to the so-and-so hall tonight at 7PM." An elderly Japanese man heard him and asked his wife if she had always felt the longing for peace that he had felt. She answered that she, too, had always searched for inner peace. That night they went to the meeting and were the first two of what later became thousands of Japanese who found peace by entering into peace with God.

Have you been running from God trying to find your own peace? Outside of the Prince of Peace there is no genuine peace. Our hearts are restless until we find our peace in Him. Won't you enter into His peace this morning? If your heart has never known rest, give Him your heart this morning. Enter into His rest, and I'll stay after the service and talk to you about how to do that and how to start a new life.

If you have problems this morning that you've been fretting over and worrying about, trust God this morning. Enter into His peace. Let's sing that chorus together as we place our troubles and fears in His hands and enter into His peace.

Let's sing this together in reverent praise:
He has me and my problems in His hands...
He has my mind and my heart in His hands...
He's got the whole world in His hands...

Trust Him and enter into His peace. Amen?

Col 3:15 (NIV) *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace, and be thankful.*