

ADVENT Week 1 - The Peace of God - Sermon Manuscript

This is the first week of the advent season where we remember and anticipate the arrival of Jesus, our Savior and King.

And so as I thought about what series we could do this year, I really wanted to focus on resting in Christ. Most of us, if not all of us, have been enduring the busyness of life.

We always joke that the older we get the faster the days and weeks fly by - so much so that it feels like we just celebrated Christmas not that long ago! But sometimes I think it feels like that because we're not good at resting in the now.

[Peace, Hope, Joy, Love] So let's use this Christmas season to slow down and reflect on things like the Peace of God, the hope that we have in Him, the joy that can be found in Him, and the love that He gives.

Today we'll focus on The Peace of God. Go ahead and turn with me to Philippians chapter 4, starting with verse 4. Here's what Paul says...

Philippians 4:4-7 - Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, 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.

This passage has been the foundation of my prayers since the summer of 2019. I can date it because I remember the first time I had an anxiety attack.

I was boarding the plane to go to Israel for 2 weeks. This was back when I was still taking classes for my masters degree at Lancaster Bible College - and this Israel trip would be the final 6 credits I needed to graduate.

I've been on trips like this before. Amanda and I flew to Hawaii for our honeymoon almost 15 years ago. We were nervous about the flight back then, but we were okay. Then during my first few months as a student ministry director

in another church I ended up going on a trip to New Orleans. I was okay during that flight - again, a little nervous, but not too bad.

But for whatever reason, something hit me unexpectedly as I boarded the plane to Israel. I don't know what I looked like on the outside, but on the inside I was a mess!

Of course I didn't have anything to calm me down. At the time I didn't even know I could take something for that! Thankfully God gifted me with an aisle seat.

I've since learned that the anxiety I was feeling was a form of claustrophobia - which up until that point I'm not sure I had experienced!

Once the flight was over I thought I'd feel better since we were on the ground, but the anxiety didn't go away. It especially hit when we were in the tour bus for two to three hours at a time.

I'm sparing you some details... but basically my mind would race and I couldn't turn it off. The anxiety was so intense that it was affecting me physically, making me feel sick.

I actually thought maybe I was coming down with something - after all, we were instructed not to drink the water while we were in Jordan for a couple days. I also wasn't the only person feeling bad.

But looking back on it, I've learned that it was anxiety. I've also been able to pinpoint exactly what triggers it. When I'm in a situation where I can't get out, anxiety hits.

Places like planes, or a bus, or even in some caves we visited in Israel. So as amazing and memorable as that trip was, it was also a real challenge.

Again, while I was in Israel I thought maybe I was just sick and things would go back to normal once I was home. But no...

Once I was up on stage with the marching band staff, in front of all the kids and parents. We were receiving thank you gifts from the kids for all the work we had

done that year. It's a big room with doors... but anxiety hit. I was stuck on stage in front of everyone until the presentation was over.

There was another time when I was at Hershey Park with my family and I could barely stand in the lines for the rides because even though we were outside, I was still stuck in line and couldn't go anywhere.

But it doesn't end there - Hair cuts, movie theaters, concerts, plays, riding the subway, and funny enough... preaching.

Because, here I am... I technically can't go anywhere. And so for the first year or two of preaching most Sundays, various levels of anxiety would hit me.

My small group knew about it and would graciously pray for me every Sunday. There was one time it was so bad that I just openly told you how I was feeling and Nettie prayed for me right here on the spot.

It's been over three years now and I still deal with anxiety, but in it I've learned to trust in the Lord more. I've learned the value of praying for His peace, and I've felt His peace that transcends all understanding...

I've even measured it! (my watch - 120bpm)

But then we read verses like...

Philippians 4:4 - Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

We might read that and think: *How am I supposed to rejoice in the Lord when I* [Fill in the blank]?

Some of us just lost a loved one. Some have loved ones that are going through some health issues. Some have some really heavy burdens weighing on us right now. Some are facing uncertainties; job changes; life changes; unexpected accidents; family drama...

But no matter what we're going through, Philippians 4:4 is commanding us to rejoice in the Lord (twice!). Does this mean that during the difficult times of our lives we're just supposed to put on our happy face and fake it till we make it?

No!

Rejoicing is when we celebrate the Lord from a posture of prayer. Rejoicing in the Lord looks like us coming to Him *with thanksgiving*. It's when we show our love and gratitude to the Lord for being able to come to Him about anything - even our anxieties.

Okay, but now look at verse 6...

Philippians 4:6 - Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Paul is yet again giving us a command in the Greek...

There are 5 commands in our passage: Rejoice (x2), Be gentle, Do not be anxious, present your requests). So in verse 6 we're commanded not to be anxious about anything!

But if Paul was sitting next to me on my trip to Israel and said, "*Hey Scott, I command you to not be anxious about anything.*" I'd say, "*Yeah, easy for you to say!*"

But that's not the point here. It's not that we're just supposed to suck it up and deal with it because life is hard.

Paul is saying that we don't have to be anxious because we can pray about whatever anxieties we have!

We don't have to make light of our situation, or ignore it, or even see it as a giant in our life that we need to defeat. Paul is saying that we can give it to the Lord in prayer.

Peter encourages us to do the same thing in 1 Peter 5:7. He says...

1 Peter 5:7 - Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Peter was a fisherman so he's got that imagery in mind. When we pray, we're casting our prayers up to God. And we don't have to worry whether or not He'll hear them... Peter reassures us that God cares for us. And so, Paul says that...

Philippians 4:6b - in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Every situation. Whether normal or extreme - that's what prayer and petition means. Prayer is just normal prayer to God, but petition is an urgent request to God.

But no matter what we're praying for, we pray with thanksgiving. We're to express our gratitude and appreciation. That's hard depending on what it is!

I just prayed with someone the other day who is losing a loved one. How do you pray with thanksgiving in a situation like that? I simply thanked God for who He is and that we can trust Him in every situation.

And so in our passage today, Paul is saying that we don't need to drown in our anxiety. The Lord is with us - He is near! And we can pray to Him about anything. And when we do...

Philippians 4:7 - And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

During the time Paul wrote this letter, everyone credited Caesar for the peace they enjoyed. He was not only their Emperor, but they saw him as their protector and their god (at least that's what he claimed).

But Paul's words directly go up against that idea. Paul says that Jesus is the one who is really in charge. He's our true God and King. He's the real reason for our peace - but His peace transcends all understanding.

In other words, His peace is superior to all other forms of peace - even Caesar's. The peace of God is beyond what we can comprehend. But when it comes, we can feel it. But even if we can't feel it yet, we know it guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Isn't it interesting that the peace of God is pictured as *guarding* our hearts and minds?

The thing is, our hearts and minds are the battlegrounds where worldly desires clash with God's will.

There's an example back up in Philippians 4:2 with two women, Euodia and Syntyche. They were coworkers with Paul. Like Paul, they preached the gospel of Jesus. And now they're leaders in the Philippian church, but it seems that there's a disagreement between them - they weren't of the same mind.

Paul doesn't tell us what it is - he doesn't need to - everyone in the Philippian church knew what it was. Whatever it was, Paul makes it clear in his letter that God's will is that they would come together and be like minded.

But the heart and mind are easily swayed by the world...

Jeremiah 17:9 says that the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. No one can understand it except for the LORD.

And yet, today we're so quick to try and fix things ourselves. Like it's our problem so we need to fix it. We might even be told that things like meditation can help us - if we could just learn to clear our minds then our anxiety will go away.

But there's a couple problems with that. The first is that even if we can somehow clear our minds, it's only temporary. No matter how good you get at it, it's temporary. The second problem is that the bible never tells us to empty our minds. Biblical meditation is described as filling our minds with the Word of God.

THAT's the kind of meditation that ushers in the Peace of God.

[Christmas Morning] When we picture the peace of God, let's not picture a nice, lightly snow covered Christmas morning...

No!

[Warrior] The peace of God stands at the door of our hearts like a mighty warrior, armed with the Word of God, which is sharper than any double edged sword.

Isaiah 9:6 - For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**.

The peace of God is what we want standing guard in the battlefield of our hearts and minds. When doubts surge; when tragedy happens; when we're tempted by the world; when the stress of life dumps more on us than we can bear...

We have the Prince of Peace standing guard. We can't begin to understand the peace of God, but we know the Lord is near - even if we don't feel like He is near, we know He is.

I've said this many times up here - **How we feel doesn't always line up with reality**. Again, there's a battle going on every day for our hearts and minds.

That's why Paul commands us to pray - no matter what the situation - no matter how tough the battle is - no matter what kind of mental and emotional state we're in - we pray.

Whether our prayers are us crying out to God in desperation or praise, we don't have to remain in a state of anxiousness. God may not take away our anxiety immediately, but He will show us His peace as we learn to trust Him even more.

So let's look at Philippians 4:4-7 one more time...

Philippians 4:4-7 - Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, 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. (cyclical)

This is the path of the Christian life.

Things will happen that try to throw us off our path, but the Prince of Peace, our trustworthy Warrior, is with us, guarding us as we walk our path.

No matter what we're going through, God's Word says that we're not alone.

I've been fortunate to have grandparents in my life that set the example for me. I've had grandparents and step grandparents, and of course grandparents on my wife's side of the family.

And whenever one of my grandparents would lose their spouse, as sad as that was, I got to see the Peace of God in action. It's definitely beyond my understanding - I couldn't imagine being in their place, losing someone they've spent their entire life with.

But I know many of you can relate because you've experienced that kind of loss. And so my encouragement for you is just a reminder...

Having the peace of God doesn't mean you'll be able to feel happy every day. You'll continue to have times when you mourn the loss of your loved one.

You might even have feelings of anger - and that's okay! Btw - David prayed those kinds of prayers in the Psalms all the time, but even in the lowest moments of his life, he remembered that the Lord is faithful and trustworthy.

So there will be ups and downs on our path of life. But the peace of God will be with us when you come to the Lord in prayer.

But it's important to remember that God's peace isn't a state of happiness like the world defines happiness. **God's peace is a state of spiritual safety and security...**

That's why in the Old Testament, even though David was in distress, he could say...

Psalm 4:8 - In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.

That's why, even when the world battles for our hearts and minds, we can rejoice in the Lord. We can rejoice because...

Psalm 46:1-7 - God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. 5 God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. 6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. 7 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Let's Pray