

Overcoming Anxiety (4)
(The Blessing of Peace)

Please read Philippians 4: 6-9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18; then pray;

God of peace, as I draw near to you through your Word, I ask you to fill and direct my life with the beauty of your grace and peace, in Jesus name. Amen

We continue our consideration of the way the bible addresses the subject of **anxiety**, and how Christians may seek to overcome it. Paul teaches that the main resource gift that God gives us to face and overcome anxiety is the very precious **gift of prayer**.

*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 transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)*

Through prayer, we access and receive the peace of God – and peace is the opposite of anxiety. Paul teaches that through prayer, peace can come to control and guard our hearts and minds, thereby replacing anxiety and fear.

By using our other short bible passage from Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, we are going to take a deeper look at the **peace of God** which subdues anxiety and brings calm and rest. At the very end of this letter, Paul prays a blessing of peace upon this troubled Church fellowship. The blessing Paul prays is short, direct and offered with the utmost confidence in God. Here it is;

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all.

This is a good way to pray for God's blessing upon an anxious and troubled individual or upon a Church fellowship; seeking the blessing of God's profound peace. The most well-known blessing of peace in the bible is the blessing given to Aaron and his sons to use over Israel. It is found in Numbers 6:24-26;

*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and **give you peace**.*

Perhaps you have said this wonderful blessing over someone, or maybe it has been pronounced over you? Learn it by heart, and use it to bless others! All Christians now have a priestly ministry which includes praying with others and blessing others in the name of the Lord.

We can look at Paul's blessing of peace in **four** ways, each of which express a separate and precious truth about God's peace which defeats anxiety.

Firstly, Paul's prayer reveals the *divine origin* of this peace which comes to conquer anxiety and fear. The Christian's peace comes from **the Lord of peace himself**. God is the Lord or God of peace. This title, "God of peace", is given to God on six other occasions in the New Testament (Romans 15:33, 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 13:20). Paul obviously liked to use it! And in the Old Testament God reveals himself to Gideon as Jehovah Shalom – God our peace. Gideon builds an altar and names it – God our Peace!

Peace is one of the great attributes of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is not just the God of peace – **He is peace**. Just as God is holy, just, righteous, loving, compassionate, and merciful – so **God is peace**.

His Divine Being and Essence is Peace. He is perfectly at peace with Himself, and flawless harmony and peace exist in the inter-relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He is Jehovah Shalom, an eternal and infinitely strong **Rock of peace**.

Unsurprisingly, all that God does is perfectly ordered and it brings order. His creation is wise and ordered; His universe is vast but ordered; His ways and purposes are perfectly timed and ordered. Paul reminded the Corinthian Church whose worship services were in disorder and disarray due to the misuse and abuse of tongues and prophecy, that God was not a God of disorder but a God of peace! (1 Corinthians 14:33). When God came into the world in Jesus, He brought God's order and peace – hence his healing and deliverance ministry – mending broken, disordered and chaotic lives. He brought with him a Kingdom of peace and righteous order, and when his Kingdom is fully revealed in the future at his second coming– all things will be made new, and there will be a new peaceful order of existence, (Isaiah 2 v 2-4) where the wolf and the lamb will feed together. (Isaiah 65:25) There will be perfect peace reigning throughout a new heaven and a new earth.

Our God is Peace. Jesus Christ is Lord (2 Thessalonians 5:16) and Prince of Peace. The Spirit is the Spirit of Peace, who descended gently upon the Son of God like a dove. This is the nature of God. And the peace that is prayed for by Paul comes from this Divine Being who is perfect Peace. Paul prays;

*Now may the Lord of peace **himself** give you peace.*

The pronoun is emphatic! It is placed at the beginning of the sentence in the original Greek. The peace the Christian receives as a blessing comes from *God himself* whose essence and being is peace. Remember the words of Jesus; *My peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you. I do not give as the world gives.* (John 14:27) Jesus, *the Lord of peace* (3:16) gives a spiritual peace which passes all human understanding. It is supernatural divine peace which comes to the child of God, to you and me.

Secondly, the peace that Paul prays for is to be understood as a gracious and loving **gift from God**. When this peace comes to a child of God – it comes as a gift – a gift to be received with gratitude and humility. It cannot be earned or deserved by us; instead it is a love gift given freely to us by God.

*Now may the Lord of peace himself **give (gift)** you peace....*

As you read the New Testament you will notice again and again that two words often come together in a divine pairing. They are *grace* and *peace*, and grace means undeserved gift/giving. They are always together, side by side in Paul's greetings (2 Thessalonians 1:2) and in his blessings (5:18) at the beginning and at the end of his letters. One concept connects seamlessly to the other. They are knit together in Paul's theological thinking. We experience peace *as a gift* of God's grace – and when God saves us by grace – it always *leads to peace* - peace with *God himself*. (Romans 5:1-2)

God our Father delights *to give* his children good gifts, and peace is one of his greatest gifts. God desires to see peace upon the earth and within the hearts of his children. Glory to God in the highest and peace *to his people* on earth! That was the song of His mighty angels at the birth of his beloved Son! (Luke 2:14) God wants us to be at peace with Himself, with one another in the Church, and God also wants us to be channels of his peace in the world. We are to be blessed peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) and we are called to sow in peace, with peace. (James 3:18).

The peace that passes all understanding, the peace that guards and shields troubled hearts and minds is indeed a precious gift. **Today**, thank God for this divine gift of grace – God's own unique peace.

Thirdly, the gift of peace is given for *every* challenging situation and circumstance we find ourselves in, for *every* occasion, and for the *whole of the time* we need it. It is given continually.

*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace **at all times and in ever way.***

God willingly blesses us with His peace continually as we pray and look to him. He wants to give us this gift “always” and “continually” as we walk and keep in step with the Holy Spirit. Peace is the fruit of the Spirit’s presence in us. (Galatians 5::2) God graciously gives us peace in various situations; in good times and in bad times; in sickness and in health; in times of hardship and in times of plenty; in the summertime of life, work and service – and as we approach and then face death. *My peace I give you says Jesus.*

God wants to give this distinctive divine peace to his children when;

- they lie in a hospital bed awaiting an operation.
- they have many pressing deadlines to meet at work.
- they are facing persecution and pressure for their faith in Jesus.
- they are about to sit a crucial examination which will affect their prospects for years to come.
- they realise they are facing the onset of dementia.
- they have to sell their family home and move into a nursing home.
- there is a virus threatening much of the world and economies are being seriously damaged.

Is there anything more precious or more important than this gift of God’s own peace? I think not! Peace in the midst of adverse circumstances. Grace in the eye of the storm. Peace, even as the boat rocks furiously from side to side and the waves threaten to sink us!

This reminds me of two stories relating to the life of John Wesley. The first one concerns the journey by boat he made to the American colonies when he was very young and not yet a true Christian. The journey by boat proved to be a turbulent, for there was a great storm. Wesley, who feared for his life, was deeply moved and convicted by the group of Moravians in the boat who “kept their peace throughout the dreadful storm.” They *knew* the God of Peace. Secondly, a story about Wesley after he had come into a living faith and was now a great evangelist who faced tireless opposition. Once when he was preaching in Wednesbury, a mob seized him by the hair and dragged him from one end of the town to the other. He kept preaching despite the severe physical abuse. At one point he managed to escape into the home of an onlooker. Later, when writing about the incident in his diary, Wesley said;

Throughout the whole experience, I had the same presence of mind (peace of mind) as if I were sat at home in my study.

Fourthly, Paul ends with what is in fact, *the greatest way God manifests his peace to us* – through his presence with us.

*The Lord **be with all of you.*** (16b)

The personal sense, awareness and experience of God’s peace *in us* comes because *the Lord* is with us. The “Lord” here in this part of the verse **is Jesus**, the same as “The Lord of peace himself” at the beginning of the blessing. The God *who is peace* is with us – always. This is the cast iron promise of Jesus Christ.

Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5, Matthew 28:20)

He will be with us “right until the end of the age” and then He will take us to be with him forever. The One who is with us is none other than the “Prince of Peace” – the God of Peace. Christ is with us now, in all life’s circumstances, in all life’s many up’s and down’s; Divine Presence and Peace alongside us each step of the journey. His presence is peace. Remember, He is the God of Peace in essence and by nature, and He is **with us!**

Paul is praying that saints may know this presence of the God of peace in every situation they face and throughout each day and night of their lives. The Prince of Peace is with us in the storms of life and as we sit beside still and quiet waters.

I explained earlier in this sermon that when Christ came into the world – he brought order and peace. Remember the amazing story of the storm on the Galilean Sea? The disciples, many of whom were experienced fishermen were panicking because of the furious squall around them. Their anxiety levels had reached their peak. They thought the end of life was near. Where was Jesus? Didn’t he care? The King of peace was with them, but he was fast asleep, sleeping like a baby with his head on a cushion. Nothing could disturb his peace. He is the Prince of Peace. In fact – He is Peace – Jehovah Shalom. Jesus gets up and rebukes the violent wind and waves – and all is calm. How and why? Because – He is **present** and He is **peace** and his kingdom authority brings and establishes peace. This is why demons causing disorder and terror left quickly once Jesus had entered a situation and told them to go! His *presence* immediately alerted them to their downfall and certain defeat.

The Lord be with you all prays Paul at the end of his wonderful prayer of blessing.

May you know the presence of the ROCK of PEACE! Jehovah Shalom – the Lord **OUR PEACE**.

To end: the complete prayer of blessing once again;

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all!

And from Philippians, *the answer* to this prayer!

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

The God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9b)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

AMEN