

## “The Presence of His Peace is Found in the Peace of His Presence”

Philippians 4:4-9

- Paul is making a promise of the peace of God which is found exclusively in the experience of His presence. As we look at the whole of Philippians, Paul is writing to assure or comfort a frightened group of believers. The irony is that their “concerns” – those which Paul is addressing in this very personal and pastoral letter – are based in Paul’s imprisonment, suffering and, what appears to be, his impending execution for preaching Jesus. They fear both losing the apostle of their faith and the persecution, which most certainly would befall them upon Paul’s death.

The peace Paul promises is born of the deep and soul satisfying joy to be found in relationship with Him through Jesus – which Paul himself knew. This life qualifying joy Paul found in knowing Jesus enabled him not only to flourish in suffering and death but to testify that death, to him, had become gain! Listen to a couple of key text which we will explore this week during our Bible studies – text which declare Paul’s transformed and indomitable life in Jesus;

- His love for and the pleasure he finds in fellow believers – 1:3-8, 9-11
- His compelling commitment to the advance of the gospel – 1:12-18
- His assurance to the praying church in his declaration that life for him “is Christ” – 1:20-21
- His declaration that all that drives his life is knowing Jesus – 3:7-14

**Note:** With these several passages setting the back story - Paul gives a series of imperatives/commands or exhortations which are intended to aid in the experience of His “peace” in our lives.

**The imperative of active and expressed joy, at all times, *in the Lord!*** – (4:4; cf. John 15:11; 16:20-24; 17:13)

- This “rejoicing” or joy has an intentional or deliberate component in the life of the believer – WE MUST DECIDE OR RESOLVE TO REJOICE OR BE JOYFUL!!
- Jesus came so that we might experience this “joy.” That is the prayer He prays before His Father on our behalf (cf. John 17:13).
- However, this rejoicing or joy is also primarily the consequence of living in relationship with the Lord AND it eclipses suffering (cf. John 15:11; also 16:20-24). This is a joy that is founded upon a relationship with the Lord which is deeply, inexpressibly soul satisfying. The apostle Peter, writing to a suffering church says it like this;

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for*

*you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."*  
(1Pe 1:3-9 NIV)

**The imperative of the distinctive Christian witness of a transcendent hope and the peace it affords – both within the church and to the world – a hope which endures and even flourishes in times of trouble - (4:5a) – This hope destroys fear and despair!**

- Paul, in using the word the NIV translates “gentleness,” is speaking of the distinctive character of the Christian which reflects the indomitable hope that is the fruit of the gospel – the gospel which promises the constant presence of the Lord. The scope of meaning for “gentleness” is seen in words like, “*yielding, gentle, kind, courteous, tolerant, forbearing.*”

- This “gentleness” reflects the certainty of the profound presence of the Lord – (4:5b – “The Lord is near.”). Listen to the psalmist describing the indomitable hope of the present Lord - Psalm 46:1-7, 10 – This is an utterly transforming reality which must be laid hold by faith.

**Before we go on to the next imperative I must say that the belief in the presence of God – in every moment and every circumstance – is only as comforting as the Christian’s understanding of and experience in relationship of the love and goodness of God – understood in Jesus!! Two points of note;**

1. He entered into solidarity with us in our humanity – cf. Hebrews 2:14-18 - a) He did this to experience and conquer our fallen condition – in His suffering and death as the incarnate Son of God. b) He did this so He could feel with us in our suffering.

2. His solidarity with us is the guarantee that, we share with Him as a son of the Father in the Son (cf. Romans 8:14-17). In addition, we are never separated from the presence and perfect love of the Father for us – He loves us with the love with which He loved Jesus (cf. Romans 8:28-39). Listen to the words of Jesus as He prays for us;

***I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*** <sup>24</sup> *"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.* <sup>25</sup> *"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> **I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in***

**order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.**  
- (Joh 17:23-26 NIV)

**The imperative to intentionally respond to anxiety or fear with “prayer” – (cf. 4:6)**

- The construction of the language is such that it sets anxiety or undue concern – worry or even the fear that often results – over against prayer.

- The language used to describe prayer is the language of unashamed, even bold dependence upon the Lord – cf. Hebrews 4:14-16 – There are 3 words used to describe the act of prayer; “prayer” which describes in general terms going before God in a sort of worshipful dependence; “requests” which is from the same root idea – a cognate of – the word used for “necessity” – these are the things we need; “requests” which is simply the things for which we ask.

- I want to focus on the phrase, “but (rather) in everything.” This means ***everything***!! There is nothing too small – “Lord I lost my car keys. Will you help me find them?” There is nothing too big – “Lord, I’m losing my job, house, income, health – I lost my spouse and the pain is unbearable – I lost my child – I’m facing cancer and I’m alone in this world and I’m terrified!! Please, Lord – help!” “Lord, there is an unseen and frightening enemy that is threatening lives around the world and the best efforts of our leaders still cannot lay to rest the dark creep of fear and panic that is moving across our world and our culture (cf. Romans 8:25-26).

Also, the phrase “but in everything” implies that this is an ongoing lifestyle or practice of prayer in dependence upon the Present God. Many among us are resorting to urgent prayer only now – in the crisis – grasping for hope in the God about whom we know but whom we have not been urgent ***to know*** intimately. Let this be the beginning of finding your hope in the One who is sovereign and who is love – beyond comprehension.

- The heart of gospel embracing, true dependence and God glorifying worship in prayer is captured in the qualifying phrase – “***with thanksgiving***.” That is the essence of reciprocating love in worship!!

**The result of such a response to the destabilizing struggles – threats – ever present in this badly broken world is incalculable and beyond understanding Peace - 4:7**

- Paul describes this peace as “the peace of God” – both peace that is from God and peace that is God. Peace is ***in a person*** first, before peace can be ***from that person***. That is the nature of the Christian life – “life is Christ” or as he writes in Colossians 3:4a – “*When Christ, who is your life...*” **All of that to say – peace is contingent upon relationship or follows relationship!! Know Him, and you will “know” His love – know His love and you will love – trust Him (as the present and perfect lover of your soul) and you will find peace in the knowledge that these present circumstances are the occasion for Jesus giving Himself more profoundly to me!!**

‘ - That peace “guards” both my heart and my mind in Jesus!! If you reflect on your thoughts and emotions over these past days – even weeks – you will see that your thoughts or meditations are driving your emotions – your heart. The government and our health officials almost must consider worst case scenario if they are to take the measures they feel are necessary to protect us. They feel they must communicate those scenarios to convince us to submit to the measures they propose. They want us to employ an abundance of caution. **However, the worst case scenario has already been presented to us – Romans 5:12-21 – and the measures necessary to defeat the death that is common to us all has been employed and proven 100% successful!! Our Savior is the Sovereign Lord of all Creation – and He personally loves you and has called your name followed by “my beloved son/daughter.” SO...**

**Paul’s final imperatives have to do with “thinking” or “setting” our minds on the real gospel truth – the “Good News” that is God Himself – 4:8-9 – He does so with 2 simple imperatives.**

- Think on real and substantial gospel truths – cf. 4:8 – This is the stuff of which Paul writes in Colossians 3:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6, 16-18. This is positive thinking of a gospel sort. By these truths we can stare down the enemy himself, who attempts to hold us captive by our fear of death (cf. Hebrews 2:14-18), in the courage and peace that comes from having the Spirit, who is God, in us – *“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”* (1John 4:4 NIV)

- Such meditation, by the Holy Spirit, makes the invisible and intangible God to be visible to the eyes of faith and tangible – He becomes the fullness of our hearts as meditations on His glory in the face of Jesus, fills our minds (cf. Hebrews 11:24-27; 1 Peter 1:8-9 – *“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup>for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”*

- He longs for you to trust His powerful presence and His perfect love. He longs to be your soul’s fullness and peace!! Let’s pray for each other in these times – And then let us speak affirmation and hope to one another and to this world gripped by fear and those who dismiss the threat as a way of managing the fear!!