

Peace - Prince of Peace

The Lights of Christmas: Finding Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Christ

Philippians 4:1-19

December 10, 2017

A 6-year-old and his 4-year-old sister presented their mom with a Christmas present: a small, spindly house plant. While it wasn't the finest looking specimen, they had bought it with their own money and Mom was thrilled. She hugged and kissed her children and told them she loved them for thinking of her.

Johnny said, "There was some other flowers we wanted to buy for you, Mom, but we didn't have enough money."

"Yeah," said sister Suzy, "they had a real nice bunch of flowers at the shop that we were going to buy."

"But I love this plant," said the happy mother.

"I know, Mom," said Johnny, "but these flowers would have been perfect for you. They were in a wreath and they had a ribbon that said 'Rest In Peace' on it and you're always asking us for a little peace so you can rest."

How many of you need a little rest and peace right now? I know I do. I've got too much on my calendar right now.

It seems every Christmas is like that. You wonder if it's worth it. But the result of Christmas is something wonderful. Without Christmas, there would be no Easter, and as Linda Brown quite wisely added in her Facebook post, "and we needed Easter."

We are looking at Advent this year through the wonderful passage from Isaiah 9:2, 6-7. I invite you to turn to page 6 in your bulletin.

*The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine... For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!*¹

We are continuing our series "The Lights of Christmas: Finding Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Christ." Last week, we said that Jesus is our hope because He is our Mighty God.

Today's takeaway is this; write it down:

He is our Peace because He is our Prince of Peace.

The government has a lot to do with the general sense of peace in its country. Its citizen's feeling of security, from outside foes or inside woes, can at times be directly affected by the decisions – or lack of decisions – by the leadership.

That's why Isaiah talks about peace and the government in the very same sentence. He says:

*[The Messiah's] government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.*²

The angels sang at Jesus' birth:

¹ Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 (NLT)

² Isaiah 9:7 (NLT)

“Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”³

Ephesians 2:14 reads:

For Christ himself has brought peace to us.⁴

In this world full of violence, whether it is murder or rape or sexual assault, whether it is war or the threat of war, whether it is demonstrations about a country's capital that was established as its capital 3,000 years ago, there is peace, real peace, true peace, only through Christ.

Write this down:

The peace of the Christian Life through the presence of Christ.

Biblical scholar Joseph Henry Thayer said this about peace: peace is “a conception distinctly peculiar to Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatever sort that is.”

The Apostle Paul talks about peace in the 4th chapter of Philippians. And in the time remaining, I want to share 3 ways the presence of Christ gives us peace.

First, Peace with Others.

As Paul was closing his letter to the Philippians, he wrote this in verse 2:

Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement.⁵

Now, this is a passage about which we would very much like to know more. There is obvious drama behind it, heartbreak and great deeds, but what it was all about, we can only guess.

It may well have been that these were women in whose homes two of the house congregations of Philippi met. Women played a big role in leadership in this church. We see this in Acts. In Philippi, Paul's first contact was with a prayer meeting by a riverside, and he spoke to the women there, among them a prominent woman by the name of Lydia, who was converted.⁶

So Euodia and Syntyche had been workers for Christ in the church. Their broken relationship was no small matter, because according to verse 3, many had become believers through their efforts. It is possible to believe in Christ, work hard for His Kingdom, and yet have broken relationships with others who are committed to the same cause. But there is no excuse for remaining unreconciled.⁷

Paul appealed to these women to find peace in their relationship. Why?

“...because you belong to the Lord...”⁸

He then enlists the folks of the church to help bring peace into these women's lives. Paul mobilized the whole resources of the Church to mend it. He thought no effort too great to maintain the peace of the Church. A quarrelling Church is no Church at all, for it is one from which Christ has been shut out. No one can be at peace with God and at odds with someone else.

³ Luke 2:14 (NLT)

⁴ Ephesians 2:14 (NLT)

⁵ Philippians 4:2 (NLT)

⁶ See Acts 16:12-15

⁷ Life Application Study Bible, Philippians 4:2

⁸ Philippians 4:2 (NLT)

If you have something against another, find peace through Christ.

Second, Peace with Self.

One day, a woman went to a counselor and asked, “How do I achieve inner peace?” The counselor said, “The way to achieve inner peace is to finish all the things you’ve started.” So the woman looked around the house to see all the things she started and hadn’t finished... and before leaving the next morning, she finished off a bag of chips, a box of chocolate chip cookies, and the kids’ leftover Halloween candy, and she said, “You have no idea how good I feel!”

Well that’s one road to peace, but I imagine that wears off pretty quickly.

Peace with one’s self involves focusing one’s thoughts and feelings on the right things, not the things Satan wants you to focus on. Satan will always point out one of two things: either he will point out your shortcomings, your transgressions, your insecurities, your fears, to make you feel that you are worthless; or he will over exaggerate your qualities, your behavior, your past, in order to get you to think you don’t need repentance, transformation, or God for that matter.

Peace with one’s self means focusing on the right things. That’s what Paul tells the Philippians in verses 8-9:

*And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. **Then the God of peace will be with you.***⁹

Otherwise, we worry. Excessive worry, or what I call toxic worry, can make you sick, it can cut down your enjoyment of life, and it can hamper your productivity. Toxic worry is bad for every system in your body: it increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes, it impairs digestion, it causes shortness of breath, it causes all kinds of musculoskeletal aches and pains, and it produces headaches and migraines.

Christian author and speaker Jill Briscoe said, “We can worry or we can worship. Strangely enough, busy people find it a whole lot easier to worry than to worship.”¹⁰

Paul’s advice is in verses 6-7:

*Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. **His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.***¹¹

Finally, Peace with Circumstances.

It was my first set of finals during my freshman year of college. That first year is always difficult: college is much harder than high school, and you’re on your own for the first time in your life. It can be stressful.

The weekend before finals, I got a note from my mom. I don’t remember what the rest of it said, but I still remember the Scripture she gave me as I prepared for finals:

Philippians 4:13:

*For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*¹²

⁹ Philippians 4:8-9 (NLT)

¹⁰ Jill Briscoe, “Heart to Heart,” Today’s Christian Woman.

¹¹ Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

¹² Philippians 4:13 (NLT)

That passage has helped me so often since that final's weekend, that no matter your circumstances, when you rely on Christ, you will have all the strength you need.

There once was a weak, sickly man. The man was so sick but he could not afford going to town to the doctor. He lived in the deep back woods in an old log cabin, and his condition seemed to grow worse.

Out in front of his cabin was a huge boulder. It was massive. One night, in a very real vision, God told him to go out there and push the huge rock all day long, day after day. The man got up early in the morning, and with great excitement he pushed the rock until lunch, then he rested a while and pushed the rock until supper time. The man loved pushing against the rock, it gave him meaning.

The dream was so real that it was with great excitement he pushed against the rock. Day after day he pushed. Days rolled into week, and weeks into months, he faithfully pushed against the rock.

After 8 months of pushing the rock, the man was getting tired of pushing the rock so much, and in his tiredness, he started to doubt his dream. So one day he measured from his porch to the rock, and after daily pushing the rock, he would measure to see how much he had moved the rock. After two weeks of pushing and measuring, he realized he had not moved the boulder even a 1/32 of an inch? As a matter of fact, the boulder was in the same place as when he started.

The man was so disappointed, he thought the dream was so special and now after 9 months he saw his work had accomplished nothing. He was tired and his dream seemed dashed upon the rock. The man sat on his porch and cried and cried, he had invested many hundred hours into nothing. Nothing, it was all nothing!

As the sun was sitting in the west, Jesus came and sat down next to the man as he cried. Jesus said, "Son, why are you crying?"

The man replied, "Lord, You know how sick and weak I am, and then this dumb dream gave me a false hope and I have pushed with all that was within me for over 9 months, and that dumb old rock is right where it was when I started."

Jesus was kind and said to him, "I never told you to move the rock; I told you to push against the rock."

The man replied, "Yes, Sir, that was the dream."

Jesus told the man to step in front of the mirror and look at himself. As an act of obedience, the man stepped in front of a mirror. He was amazed; he had been so sickly and weak, and what he saw in the mirror was a strong muscular man. He realized that he had not been coughing all night. He started thinking of how well he felt for several months and the strength that he had built by pushing on the rock. Then he realized that the plan of God was not for the rock, but for the man.

So, I suggest to you today, that God is building people; you. God is building churches. The storms, the trials, the heartaches, the disappointments, are all but part of the process. Don't start measuring your success; trust the God that will take the process, and build His people. God is stretching you; God is growing you! Understand the plan! Trust His Hands!