

Peace

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[0 : 00] One of the big ideas that we're going to look at and think about this morning is a word that comes up a couple of times in our passage. It is the idea of peace. The idea of peace. And everyone wants to have peace, don't they?

Everyone, without an exception, wants to have peace. And they want it in different ways. We want to experience peace personally, each of us. But don't we also, it's not just a personal thing, but we want our communities and we want across the world.

That everybody seems to want. And it's right that we want peace everywhere. Everybody wants peace. So I suppose the issue really is therefore, what do people mean?

What do we mean when we talk about peace? We've got one of the kids books that we've got at home. We've got a book called Five Minutes Peace. It's about an elephant who gets stressed with her children and all she wants is five minutes peace.

At the end of the book she gets a pool bathroom cup of tea and she gets five minutes to herself. Sometimes that's what people mean, isn't it, by peace. They just mean their downtime. Now don't get me wrong, everyone needs downtime.

[1 : 14] Time to rest. But that is not what we're talking about when we're talking about biblical peace. I'm going to define what we mean by what the Bible means, where it's five minutes peace for us.

Just so that we know where we're at. We're all starting from the same starting point. Peace is the absence of tension or hostility. Either internally or externally.

We've all experienced that inner tension, haven't we?

Or even that, you might even call it an inner hostility, a worry with ourselves, with our own feelings. It can happen when there's lots going on in life where we obsess with worry.

It keeps us away. That pan of butterflies seems to never leave. The only time when you feel okay is when you're asleep. And if it gets too bad, you might even get headaches or have chest pain because of it.

[2 : 20] And all we want to do when we're going through that, we just want to feel normal again. Internal peace is an absence of that experience.

That is what internal peace is. It might not be a change in circumstances, but it's an internal absence of the tension that those circumstances might have been found.

The other type of peace is connected, is external, isn't it? And more often than not, it is connected to relationships, an absence of tension with other people.

Relationships are either one of the two. They're either peaceful or they're straight. With people you know well, but with people you don't. We want peaceful relationships with friends and family.

But as we've prayed already, the lack of peace we've seen on the streets of the UK over the last week, the hatred, the mock violence, the writing, it is all connected to a lack of peaceful relationships between people living in the same community.

[3 : 25] And it stretches all the way to, when we think about relationships, to the most important relationship. The relationship you and I have with Jesus Christ.

Because as we prayed, people naturally do not have peace with him. But are at odds, there was a time when we had a hostile relationship with Jesus.

But it was Jesus who drew us to himself, reconciling that relationship so that we could have peace with him. And so this morning, that's what we're talking about.

We're talking about peace. What it means to have peace, where to find it, how to get it, and what to do when you don't have it. Both for yourself and also within the community.

The first type of peace that we're going to look at is peace, it's quite specific. And we'll go, later on we'll look at peace more generally. But the first type is peace in our relationship, but in a very specific way.

[4 : 29] We see that one of the reasons Paul is writing to the Philippian church, it comes out in verse 2. It's about a relationship between two women in the church that is threatening church unity.

Judea and Syntyche. Now we don't know what the disagreement is about, but it is significant enough that Paul has heard about it. It's significant enough that he feels like he needs to address it. Verse 2. I plead with Judea and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Notice with me, Paul doesn't take sides.

He says, I appeal to both of them. He doesn't include, he doesn't sort of bridge them under one appeal. He says, I plead with you and I plead with Judea and I plead with Syntyche.

He appeals to them both separately and he appeals that they have a shared mindset. Why? Because they are both in the Lord, in Christ Jesus.

[5 : 27] They both belong to Jesus Christ. Throughout this letter to the Philippian church, Paul has gone on quite a lot. About what it means to share Christ's mindset.

One of the highlights of the whole letter, the theme perhaps, comes in chapter 1 verse 27. If you just flick over the page, Paul said, whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

And later in chapter 2, he went on to explain what that manner looked like. Verse 5. He said, in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

He said, just before, what does that look like? Just before verse 5. In humility, value others above yourselves. Not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.

The unrest, the lack of peace between these two women comes because they look to their own interests. And not to the interests of one another, or even the interests of the church.

[6 : 37] Now just to say, just to pause, it doesn't mean they need to agree. If there is a point of difference, you know, conflict is often necessary.

So the point is not that they just agree in everything. But the point is that they need to disagree well. That they disagree with humility.

Church unity, togetherness, being side by side for the gospel, is so important that Paul suggests that even, it's so important that he even wants the church to help these two women sort it out.

Verse 3. Yes, I ask you, my true companion, help these women. He's talking perhaps there's someone in the church, someone senior, a leadership figure to mediate reconciliation.

Paul thinks very highly of both of them. As he speaks on how they've been with him in gospel ministry. That word for contended that we read, I think it's at the end of the second in verse 3.

[7 : 46] That word for contended is a word that's typically used for gladiators. Fighting side by side in the arena, in gladiatorial combat.

These two women have been fighting for the gospel alongside Paul. They are examples of Christians who in the past have conducted themselves in a manner where they live the gospel.

So, he wants to assure the church that these two are genuine believers. It reminds us, doesn't it? It reminds us as we hear about this church that have been doing so well, partnering with Paul, doing, really thriving as a church.

It reminds us that any church, ours included. When you bring people who sin, when you bring them together, it is very likely that at some point they will sin against each other.

And it is very likely that there will be a conflict. And it could be anything. It could be something that starts sort of small, if not nipped in the bud, that can grow. A belief, the way someone acts.

[8 : 53] What someone says that's maybe tactless or faultless. Maybe speaking without knowing the full story. Poor communication or gossip. You might not even agree with the decisions leadership made.

Those things will happen. And there's no doubt. If it's something you don't agree with, it can be upsetting. But what it means is that it is right to talk about.

It's not good to silently stew. We know conflict will happen. And we're not going to shy away from it and pretend that we're perfect. I've made mistakes over the last few years and I know I'll continue to do so.

What really matters is how to do conflict well. With respect, with honesty, with openness that we don't have approaches. We need to make sure we sort things out.

Sometimes it might need someone to be here. That doesn't mean it's a big issue, but that sometimes we deal with things better when we do them with someone who can help sort things out. [9 : 59] Above all, what we're saying is that peaceful relationships with one another must be our aim. If we follow Jesus, we have peace with God.

We should flow into our relationships with one another. We all belong to Jesus. And so what can I encourage us this morning? Can I encourage all of us to, as much as we possibly can, be open, be honest, be upfront?

Because you see, when things are brought into the light, they lose their power. Peaceful relationships can continue when conflict is done well.

When conflict is done well. We have the mind of Christ. In humility, we must value others above ourselves when we disagree. So that's the first thing, is peaceful relationships, which is quite specific.

The first thing, peaceful relationships in this instance inside the church. Paul recognises how important they are. A divided church is a threat to the witness of Jesus Christ.

[11 : 05] You see, peace in a church testifies to God's work in creating a people for himself that love one another. And yet, I think there is something else that Paul wants to get at here.

There's something else he wants to say. Because what happens next as he's writing a letter is Paul connects individual inner peace with peaceful relationships within the church.

And we actually know that to be the case in our lives, don't we? Strained, tense relationships cause stress and anxiety.

That's true, isn't it? If you know you're a loggerhead with someone, it does cause you a bit of stress inside. It causes tension. It takes away your inner peace.

A high proportion of stress comes when conflict is not dealt with well. There's other reasons as well when we lack peace. Don't get me wrong. However, it is not by accident that Paul writes about peace.

[12 : 05] Just after talking about reconciling two women that are not at peace. Which I take to me. I take to me. That the issue was stressful for the church.

It was bringing anxiety to the church, to the leadership. We have that on top of the threat of possible suffering and persecution that comes earlier on in the letter. And there's a whole host of reasons why Paul needs to talk about peace.

From verse 49, Paul suggests five things. Five things. That when there's threats outside the church and inside the church, when there's suffering that will take away your peace, how to respond to it. Maybe you're struggling today with something like that. Maybe there's personal suffering. There's anxiety. There's things going in your life that are disturbing your inner peace.

Maybe there's relationships that you, somebody that you are at conflict with. And it's not being done well. And it's causing you that inattention. Maybe there is things that are stopping you from sleeping.

[13 : 12] These verses from the living God are here to help. If that's going on. At any time. And before we get into it, I just want to say, not to say if you are struggling, if life is weighing you down, if you've not got peace.

This is not there as a verse that you're saying, oh, just do this and you'll be fine. That wouldn't be compassionate or caring for you.

They're not to be done exclusively on your own, but in community, side by side, together, helping one another, sharing life and supporting one another. The first thing that Paul says to do is in verse 4.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. The call is to... The reason that we rejoice, isn't it? The reason that we have joy is because we remember who Jesus is and what he's doing for us.

That we remember how great our salvation is and we celebrate it. We don't celebrate it. We can celebrate it on our own, but generally, we might be loved at that time, but we also celebrate it together with our church family.

[14 : 24] We remind one another of how good it is to know Jesus and help one another to rejoice always. We remind one another of grace that everything that you have is a gift that you've been completely forgiven, all your sins washed away, paid for by his blood, that your future is secure.

You're accepted by Jesus unconditionally. The good I am and be for it. This is what it means to be in the Lord, to have his Holy Spirit living in you.

We remind one another of that when we feel like we know, perhaps, that the person is struggling to rejoice. And we rejoice. We can rejoice too. It might be hard sometimes.

Remind one another that you share a saviour. My name is written in the book of life. Rejoicing in Jesus, it lifts our hearts, it lifts our minds, our emotions, to that there's something bigger.

So the first one is rejoice. The second one, verse 5, Let your gentleness be evident to all. In the heat of conflict, either with those outside the church or inside, gentleness goes a long way.

[15:38] Gentleness, gentleness really, is an outworking of joy in the world. It is a manifestation of outworking. If you have rejoiced in all that the Lord has done for you, his grace and love and compassion, how he's been gentle with you, will naturally come out.

How could you not be gentle with everyone else when you know and remember the Lord's gentleness and kindness to you? You see that, if you think back to Jesus' life, we see that gentleness on show throughout the minutes, throughout his ministry.

And such a striking example. You think the night that Jesus was betrayed, you think how he treated Judas and Peter. Both of them with absolute gentleness.

He knew Judas had already betrayed him and was going to follow through in his plan. And if you knew that level of betrayal, I don't know how you would respond, but you might have thought that there might be a raised voice, maybe a shout, maybe get out, I don't ever want to see you again.

Does Jesus shout and raise his voice at Judas? Does he embarrass him in front of the group? He doesn't do any of that. He knows that Peter is going to deny him. Three times you'll be denying him before the cock crows.

[16:53] His reasonableness, his gentleness was seen, it's evident to all. There is definitely a conflict between Jesus and Peter, and Jesus. There is definitely a reason that he perhaps doesn't have a peaceful relationship, but he makes it because of the way he handles it with gentleness and reasonableness.

He maintains the peace, even against those who were pregnant and those who would be married. It speaks to us, not to be hot-headed, but gentle. It goes a long way.

When fire meets with fire, things just get hotter, and the conflict burns. Gentleness cools it all down.

And when conflict is good, when there is no tension or raised horses, it's all everybody's heart.

So that's the second one. The third one, and this is a little bit longer here, verse five. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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.

The reason we can pray is because the Lord is near. You know, Jesus Christ really is present with you. He's present with all who follow him, and he doesn't leave you for any reason.

[18:21] When you sin, he doesn't leave you. When you feel lonely, he's right there. When you're afraid, he's right next to you. When you're in a panic and you can't sleep, he's there, close, near, not distant, not far away, right there with you.

He even knows what you're going to pray for. You open your mouth. You know when you pray, it doesn't say, it's interesting, it doesn't say, do not be anxious about some things, or most things.

It says, don't be anxious about anything, and the reason is because the Lord is near. However, the Lord, it's fascinating in the midst of this verse, the Lord knows that whilst it is right not to be anxious and to worry, he knows we're still going to.

He gives us the command, don't do it, but he knows we're still going to. There's that, there's such a compassion here in this verse from Jesus. Right in through prayer. Right in through prayer. But whilst he gives us the command, he still knows where our hearts are like, and knows what we're going to anyway.

What the Lord's really saying is, don't worry, don't be anxious about anything. But I know you will, and so when you do, whatever the situation, speak to me, present your requests, present the situation that's causing the anxiety, the stress to me.

[19:44] Come to me. Bring it all to God. Be anxious about nothing, by being prayerful about everything. Be anxious about nothing, by being prayerful about everything.

Look, anxiety, worry, panic attacks, the heart. And before we go any further, I just need to say, I'm not talking about anxiety and mental health issues that require medical treatment.

I'm not touching, but that is very, very different. I'm talking about the normal worry anxiety that sort of everyone has. Even in that, some people are more disposed to being worried, and it's really hard. Anxiety, worry, I've experienced myself can become a habit. Anxiety is that, but sometimes when you worry, for me, it can feel like at least you're doing something about it.

And you can bounce along, jumping from one way to the next and never experience that peace. Be anxious about nothing, by being prayerful about everything.

[20 : 55] And what does he promise? Verse 7, The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your mind in Christ Jesus.

The peace of God from the God of God. The word for guard there is, is the word that literally sort of means like a fortress protecting the city.

You see, the God of peace promises to be like a fortress around your heart and around your mind, protecting how we think, what we feel, and how evil we don't act.

So that we think how God does about what we feel. He's not promising to answer all our prayers how we want. Our circumstances may not change, but he is promising to be right beside you in the midst of it all.

With a community who's with you, a church in the city of God, with peace beyond what we can comprehend. Peace that comes supernaturally, really.

[22 : 01] The peace of God from the God of God. Which means, what does that mean?

It means when you feel like praying, praying, when you don't feel like praying. Or ask someone else. Ask someone else. God promises to be that you have thoughts in your mind who run away from you.

Peace from God. And the God. And the peace. Fourth and fifth, what I'm going to do together, much deeper. Verse eight and nine.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is humble, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

Whatever you've learned or received or heard from me or seen me, you've put into practice. Have we got peace or we can do that? Which means that we can bring a level of tension or unrest into our minds by what we think about.

[23 : 15] The way to do that is to be mindful about what you think about. To be mindful about what enters your mind. And it's hard these days, isn't it? We've got access to so much on our phones, 24-hour news, movies and TV about every topic under the sun, podcasts and books coming out of your ears.

And it's what it's reminding ourselves, isn't it? That once you've let something into your mind, whether you've read it or seen it, you can't unsee it. You can't unhear it.

Your senses are the windows to your soul. If you were, I don't know, when you were out with your family, I don't know, when I was little, I remember, my mum and dad did this when I was little.

If there was something that came on the TV or there was somebody shouting in the corner, they would cover my eyes or put their hands over my ears. Oh no, we've got to protect him.

This wasn't good for me. I probably still do that with my own children. I have to be careful with how much news I can assume. I try to stay informed of what's going on, but I know that even just the last week, getting way too involved in the news on the riots and the US presidential election.

[24 : 28] I remember feeling the same when the terrorist attacks happened in London and I lived there and it was that constant sort of drip, drip, drip of everything going on. I get really stressed, really anxious.

But be careful with what we let in to our souls, our senses, our windows. Think about things that are healthy for you. And primarily, what we realise in these verses is that it revolves around Jesus.

He's he fixed all the Catholics. He is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable, excellent, appraisal. So think about it.

And finally, verse 9, put into practice what you see in the world. Put into practice the good that you see in other Christians or the mature people in the faith.

Learn from it. What will you do? All this, the God of peace will be with you. The God of peace will be with you. Peace with God. And God will be with you.

[25 : 35] And just to conclude, isn't that, that's what we're really after, isn't it? The God of peace. We don't, we all want peace. But peace abstracted from God isn't actually peace at all.

What we want is that peace actually comes from having a relationship with God. peace. It's not that we just want peace, we need a relationship with God. We want peace from God because, we want peace from God because we have peace with God.

Do you want peace in your relationships, in conflict? Does it mean you can't have conflict? It just means do it right with you. And if you're struggling, five things.

Rejoice in your mind. Be gentle. Make sure you're gentle. I will be too bad. Pray about everything. Think about what's good. Be careful of what you matter.

And practice what you say. And peace with God in your life. Peace with God in your life. Peace. You?

[26 : 41] Thank you.