

God's Presence, Our Peace

I Peter 1:2

I would like to begin this morning by considering two definitions. The first word I want to define is the word we are studying in today's message. If you were to look up the word peace in Webster's New World Dictionary you would find this definition.

1. Freedom from war or a stopping of war;
2. A treaty or agreement to end war or the threat of war. Incidentally I read a statistic estimating that there have been over 8,000 treaties made – and broken.
3. Freedom from public disturbance or disorder; public security; law and order; (That was certainly lacking this past week on Univ. Calif. Berkley or days after the inauguration.)
4. Freedom from disagreement or quarrels; harmony; concord;
5. An undisturbed state of mind; absence of mental conflict; serenity: in full peace of mind;
6. Calm; quiet; tranquility

The Greek word for peace is found in each book of the New Testament with the exception of I John. Its meaning is much the same as in the Old Testament. Like the word grace, which we considered last week, peace can have a number of variations to its meaning including just an expression of greeting or valediction (closing) as was the custom in that culture. It was customary to begin and conclude your conversation with shalom שָׁלוֹם or ειρήνη. "Peace be with you" the response being "and with you as well."

It carried a general sense of well-being to the recipient. We see this sense of its meaning in Isaiah 48:17-18 "This is what the Lord says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to My commands, your peace would have been like a river, your

righteousness like the waves of the sea.'" Peace would have been abundant and overflowing.

The word in the New Testament has three general ideas according to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

1. Peace as a feeling of peace and rest.
2. Peace as a state of reconciliation with God.
3. Peace as the salvation of the whole man in an ultimate eschatological sense.

When we consider the context and intent of the letter, we conclude that Peter is not speaking here about peace with God that comes through salvation carrying the idea of reconciliation, but rather that there is a sense of inner tranquility they could experience even in the middle of persecution. Let me underscore that peace from a Biblical perspective is very different in its scope than peace as offered in the dictionary or by the world. Jesus made this abundantly clear in John 14:27 when He said the peace He offered was different than the peace the world offered. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

So when we come back to the world's definition of peace it's no wonder that the antonym or opposite of peace is war, but in the Biblical context often times we see that the opposite of peace being anxiety or fear. At times peace is between two nations or between two people, but often times it is directed at one's own inner well-being in spite of difficult life events.

Someone has searched Scripture and found there to be 365 verses that in one way or another command us not to worry or be anxious or fear, the opposite being then that we are to be at peace. One commentator went so far as to associate contentment with peace. There is that sense of contentment Jesus laid out in the Beatitudes when He told the crowds not to be anxious about what

they would eat or drink or wear because the Father knew their needs. Instead the focus was to seek after God's kingdom and righteousness and those needs would be provided. In it is the idea of peace and contentment.

Now, I said there were two definitions. Let me give you the second one. We need to see what anxiety is. Again from Webster's Dictionary:

1. A state of being uneasy, apprehensive, or worried about what may happen; concern about a possible future event;
2. In Psychiatry peace is an abnormal state like this, characterized by a feeling of being powerless and unable to cope with threatening events, typically imaginary, and by physical tension, as shown by sweating, trembling.

In the Greek it's the word merimna and means to be drawn in different directions, to distract, hence the idea of anxiety because our thoughts are pulled in so many different directions.

James says that a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Let me say this one thought before we move on.

It's very profound and you may have heard it, but it bears repeating because it's true.

Peace and anxiety cannot coexist. It never has and it never will. Peace and anxiety cannot coexist.

I have titled the message God's presence, our peace. Isn't that what we read in Psalm 23:4 that even though we walk through the shadow of death there isn't anything to fear because God is with us and in Hebrews 13:5 we read that He will never leave us or forsake us, and in Isaiah 41:10 we are told not to fear because God is with us?

Merrill F. Unger has stated "To have the peace of God, is to have the God of peace."

So let's turn to the Bible and see what it has to say about peace.

A peace that is from God

A peace that is given by God

A peace that is guaranteed through God

A peace that is growing because of God

I. A PEACE THAT IS FROM GOD

The bumper sticker has it right.

Know God, know peace.

No God, no peace.

Peace comes from God.

In the Old Testament we see God bestowing His peace on His people, when they obey His commands. For example:

Psalms 29:11 "The Lord will give strength unto His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace."

In the New Testament we find verses like Romans 15:33; 16:20; Philippians 4:9; I Thessalonians 5:23; and Hebrews 13:20 referring to Him as the "God of peace."

Then in Philippians 4:7 and Colossians 3:5 we find the "peace of God."

Or in Galatians 5:22 we are told that peace is the fruit of the Spirit.

II Corinthians 1:2 says that this peace is "from God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ."

The kind of peace Peter is speaking of only comes from God. Remember, it was Jesus who said that this is entirely different than anything the world can give. The world's peace is temporary at best. It is incomplete. It's not even guaranteed.

The world says if you have enough money you'll have peace.

The world says if you aren't happy in one relationship jump to another one and find peace.

The world says if you get the right job or position or power you'll find peace.

The world says there's peace in buying the right car, wearing the right style or owning the right home. The world says if you get your mind and body into that quiet place and position you will find peace.

A lot of people have bought into the line that Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself." Peace depends on each person. According to the poem *Invictus* by William Henley – "I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul."

We are not and will not ever be the source of our peace or the peace of anyone else. There is only one source for peace that lasts, peace that is complete and it comes from God.

Whether it is peace with God or the peace of God, He is the source and in order to have the peace of God in every and all circumstances we need to first of all have peace with God and there is only one way that is possible.

Ephesians 2:14-22 (v. 14 – made Jew and Gentile into one body in Christ) "He Himself is our peace." Romans 5:1 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we *have* peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now there's a little word in the middle of Romans 5:1 that is of significance. It's the word "have". "we *have* peace"

It's not past tense meaning something we once had but now is no longer ours. It's present tense and means to possess. Because of faith in Christ at the moment of salvation we have or we possess peace with God and from that moment on we will always possess peace with God. We were once enemies but now through Christ our relationship has been restored and we are at peace with God. Because the love of God will not fail in salvation neither will peace with God fail. In Christ we will always have peace *with* God. Now that doesn't mean we'll always have the peace *of* God. That's based on our

willingness to let God be in control of all our circumstances believing that He allows all things to work for our good, to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. When we understand that then the peace *of* God will rule in our heart even in difficult circumstances. That's the message I believe Peter wanted to convey to this audience that peace could be theirs if they believed God.

Colossians 3:15

There's a familiar passage in the Old Testament that has as much to do with peace as it does with trust. Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord..." When we have absolute trust there is overwhelming peace.

So my friends, if you want to experience the peace *of* God you must first possess peace *with* God. In either case, God is the source of peace, it is a fact that is undeniable.

Scripture then shows us that peace is His to give.

II. A PEACE THAT IS GIVEN BY GOD

II Thessalonians 3:16

When we are rightly related to God and His will He will give us His peace. That was clear to the Israelites when God told them if they obeyed Him, He would give them His peace. As we noted from Isaiah 48 His peace would be theirs in abundance. In that regard His peace is unending. It will continue on and on and on.

And if it is His to give then it is also His to withhold. Now I am not referring to withholding peace with God. When by faith I place my trust in Christ for salvation, anyone who comes to Him He will not cast aside. He wants all to be saved, to have peace *with* God. What I am referring to is the peace of God that can be withheld. How is that possible?

I think He will withhold His peace when we continue to live in sin, disobedient to His commandments.

I think God's peace can be withheld when we are divisive whether within our family or in the church. A common thread that occurs with the underlying idea of peace is that of unity.

Romans 15:5-6 "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

When there is no peace there is no praise.

When there is unity in the body the result is peace within the body that expresses itself in giving God glory.

Here's another one. I think God's peace can be withheld when we allow guilt to cloud our minds because of some sin we committed, but we need to remember a very important truth found in Romans 6:1 "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus."

If God doesn't condemn us because we are in Christ, why do we continue to allow guilt to rob us of peace we could otherwise experience?

How about this: If I am unwilling to forgive someone else I believe God will withhold peace.

I also think that when we are unwilling to accept God's plan for our lives we will lack His peace. That unwillingness says we think we know better than God what's best for us.

Let me give you just one more. We lack the peace of God when allow any fear or worry or anxiety to trouble our minds.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest

for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

It's an invitation to receive His peace.

Peter reminds us that we are to cast our cares on Him because He cares for us. By doing this we confidently rest in the One who is able to take those cares and replace them with His peace and rest. From Him comes an unending supply of peace, a peace that is guaranteed through God.

III. A PEACE THAT IS GUARANTEED THROUGH GOD

We aren't guaranteed peace from what the world offers. It may come, but will only be temporary. Real peace lies in Isaiah 26:3 "Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee because he trusteth in Thee."

Let me ask you a question. My guess is you will all say yes. Do you believe in God?

If I were to ask if you know God, again I think you would all respond in the affirmative.

Let me ask another question. Do you have a deep, abiding sense of peace? Most of you might say "Yeah, right now I feel a deep sense of peace. I love being in God's house, I love hearing God's Word, I love singing songs to God, I love being with God's people, so yeah, I feel at peace. But as soon as I step out those doors, it seems to go away." The mind wanders to some event from the recent past or something in the week to come.

The doctor visit

The phone call

The test

Income tax

An appointment with the boss

And many others.

Do any of these tend to take away your peace? My guess is that we would all have to say yes.

W.H. Auden wrote a book of poetry back in the early 1900's called the Age of Anxiety. Even in the

roaring '20's there was worry. It had followed the Great War and then preceded the Great Depression and then WWII. It's not much different now.

Anxiety and the things which cause anxiety are all around us. So there is a great disparity between what we believe and how we feel or think.

Let me ask you a couple more questions the answers to which can be never, seldom, frequently, or consistently.

Do you have peace of mind?

Is your mind controlled by the Holy Spirit?

Is your mind filled with worries over circumstances regardless of whether you have control over them or not?

Are your feelings at peace?

You may ask how feelings have anything to do with peace, but I assure you there is a connection. How you feel affects how you live.

Let me toss out some feelings and see if you won't agree that they affect your peace: anger, resentment, envy, fear, frustration.

Anger because someone else got your job or took your parking space.

Frustration because you're stuck in traffic.

Fear over a recent diagnosis.

Do any of these feelings or circumstances rob you of peace?

True peace will last through the storms of life no matter how severe.

That can be rather hard to do though can't it, especially when the circumstances are really difficult or we don't see any way out of the situation.

Take a little boat ride with me.

Matthew 14:22-33

This is a familiar passage that helps us understand that how we respond to feelings and events can

affect whether or not we experience peace. The disciples were traveling by boat when a severe storm blew in.

Can you feel the viciousness of the storm as the boat pitches back and forth on angry waves? Do you feel the pelting rain against your face, eyes blurred from the relentless spray? Can you hear the anxious voices crying out to one another to bail faster and row harder? Can you feel the pounding thunder beat against your chest? Does a greater sense of fear wash over you as the appearance of a man immerses through the blinding brightness of distant lightening breaking through the darkness for a only a second? It's there, then gone, and then there again but gone when the light evaporates. It appears to be coming closer. Greater fear. Faster rowing. Louder shouts.

Matthew describes their feelings with just one word – "terrified."

Through the panic and the storm, Jesus speaks above the pandemonium and they hear these words: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Uncertain if it was the Lord, Peter said if it truly was the Lord speaking, tell him to step out of the boat. I also believe that Peter believed that if it was the Lord, He would protect him from the raging storm. And he was right – as long as his focus was on Christ.

For a moment Peter forgot about the fury that was all around him. Stepping out in faith he hopped over the side of the boat and began to walk on the water while all the others clung in fear to the edge watching in utter amazement still in disbelief. Let me suggest that peace moves us, but fear immobilizes us.

Only after Peter looked around and saw again the storm did he begin to sink because he took his eyes and trust off the Lord, and in that moment lost his peace and trust, and his footing.

Here's some sound advice offered by the author of Hebrews. It helps us maintain peace when we're going through stuff we otherwise wouldn't be able to handle, that causes us anxiety.

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary or lose heart.” (Hebrews 12:2-3)

Ahh, there's our answer. Staying focused on Christ.

Here's a question. In the middle of all the chaos that is around you and wants to overwhelm you, to keep you gripped in the icy fingers of fear, how can you know you hear the voice of God? How do you know He'll give you His peace? After all, for the disciples it was dark, they had been rowing for hours to no avail. They could have been delirious from all the energy they had exerted by that time. We can understand why they were fearful, why they were losing heart. They could have thought they saw something. They could have thought they heard something but been totally misled.

How do we discern the voice of God amidst all the other voices telling us to step out or that tell us that a dose of fear is normal and okay?

I believe it came in Jesus's initial words to them:

“Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.”

Whatever difficulty you are facing Jesus is saying to you “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.”

What's your response to Jesus when He speaks these words to you in your storm?

Advance in time a couple years. Jesus has been crucified. A couple women reported that they had seen Jesus alive, but none of the disciples had seen any evidence except the moved stone and empty grave. On one particular night they are huddled in an upper room of some house scared stiff because they feared the same fate awaited them. The doors

were locked and the windows shut up tight when Jesus appeared out of nowhere and said “peace be with you.” Their response was natural. Ours would have been the same. To be afraid.

Let me suggest to you this morning that when the Lord tells us to take courage, don't be afraid and we listen to His voice, there is a settled calmness that pervades our mind and soul that results in absolute trust and peace. No wonder Peter acted as he did in getting out of the boat. God's presence means our peace. He believed and it was so. For those seconds of walking on water he had the peace of God because he trusted God with all his heart.

Isaiah 26:3 “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because He trusteth in Thee.”

Back in the days of CB radios and those of you who have driven semis will remember a little thing called drafting. You're driving along when the crackle of the CB alerts you to attention. Someone is hailing you. They've been following you and they want to know if they can draft behind you. The force of wind that comes around the backend of a semi can be pretty strong, like driving head on into strong winds. It can cause drag on the car. Drafting means tucking in right behind the semi out of the force of the wind that otherwise comes from the back end of the truck. Drafting then pulls you along making it easier to drive and can help save gas because the semi is breaking the wind for you.

When we draft in close to the Lord, He pulls us along out of the force of the storms we face and He takes the full force of it and we experience His peace. Now, notice that the storm isn't removed. We just have someone else leading the way.

Let me come back to Isaiah 26:3. I learned something this week as I studied this verse I never knew before. When Isaiah writes about perfect peace that phrase in the Hebrew is actually “peace, peace.” Repetition of the word gives it the idea of

perfect peace.

According to Isaiah the first step to perfect peace is to have our minds stayed on God. It speaks of our mindset. The corresponding phrase is found in the Greek in Philippians 2:5 “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” In other words, let this be your attitude or to put it another way, peace is given to those whose minds are intentionally fixed on God. Let Him permeate our thoughts.

Paul said it this way to the Philippians “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (4:6-7)

The Philippians reads “Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus.”

The closer we are to the Lord, the clearer we will hear His voice, trust Him, and be settled by His peace that keeps the darts of anxiety from penetrating. It literally guards our heart and mind.

Why do I fear? I fear because I don't trust God. Do we somehow think that God is incapable of handling all our difficult life circumstances whatever they may be? Do we somehow think that if we relinquish them to Him we will feel completely out of control of the results and totally at His mercy?

I think that's what Paul meant when he said “when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Yet that is the answer to perfect peace. Isaiah 26:4 continues: “Trust in the Lord *forever*, for in God, the Lord, is *everlasting strength*.”

We were never meant to trust in people or things. Those will fail, but not God. If we want God's peace, a peace that is unsurpassed, a peace that guards our otherwise anxious hearts, then we must trust Him with all our heart and not lean on our own understanding. When we do that His peace is guaranteed.

There is one final but short point. We come back full circle to our passage in I Peter 1:2. Peter wants the grace and peace of God to be theirs in abundance. I find in that a peace that is growing because of God.

IV. A PEACE THAT IS GROWING BECAUSE OF GOD

God has an abundance of peace that is sufficient for all who will rest and trust in Him through the trials of life. There is plenty to go around. God will never be seen wringing His hands wondering how He's going to help you through this seemingly troublesome predicament.

His is a peace that is unmeasurable.

His is a peace that is undeniable.

His is a peace that is unlimited.

His is a peace that is unending.

His is a peace that is unyielding.

His is a peace that is unsurpassed.

All because

It is a peace that is from God

It is a peace that is given by God

It is a peace that is guaranteed through God

It is a peace that is growing because of God

You admitted that you believe in God. Do you believe that what the Bible says about Him is true?

If we believe God is who He is and we believe the Bible to be true in what it says about God let me ask you the same question Jesus asked Peter “Why did you doubt?”

He wants to give you His peace. Will you let Him?

Peace isn't the absence of war or turmoil in one's life.

Peace that Jesus gives is the confidence that He is always with you and in that confidence there is nothing to fear. The appropriation of His peace is conditioned on our complete trust in Him.

Communion