

**“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”**

Last week we discussed the power of thanksgiving and its role in helping us perseverance and endure through life. We also discussed how an attitude of gratitude and giving thanks to God magnifies God to the glory God so warrants. How many of us stopped and took a breath and remembered something or someone you are thankful for this week? *Good. You know it only works if we actually embody it. I can say and think it, and you can say it and think it here on Sunday morning, but if we don't allow it to permeate our life outside of that it doesn't help much.*

Last week I also shared there is a promise within this text that should alter our ways and our thoughts towards thanksgiving all the time. In Philippians, Paul essentially gives us an equation to live by: Rejoicing + not worrying + praying to God with thanksgiving = the peace of God guarding our hearts and minds. The promise of the peace of God to guard our hearts and minds is what I mentioned we would be focusing on this morning and indeed we are.

Have any of you ever felt like a pinball in one of the old pinball machines: constantly bouncing from this to that, hit by this, thrown by that? Are any of you tired of being all stirred up, frenzied, panicked, anxious? Maybe it doesn't happen continually to you, but every once in a while, something happens, or someone says something that pushes a button inside you and throws you into a tizzy! A change happens at the church we don't quite understand, or we receive news of a loved one facing a difficult battle. These things happen. What do we do when this happens? Do we react well? What do we say: anything helpful? In these moments or seasons of life, something or someone has gotten the best of us, and what we know is that it doesn't feel good or right.

So, what do we need? Answers or explanations? They may help some but will likely only last temporarily. To take control of everything in life? As much as we might think we can do a better job than everyone else at what they are doing, we know having control of everything is not realistic. I am taking a big step from the shelf our emotions often rest on to the depths of our hearts where our emotions are controlled, but what we all need deep down in our souls is the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, for it shall keep (guard) our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Why is the peace of God so paramount? A sidebar and textual note help us understand more fully the true gift and magnificence of the peace of God. The word “surpasses or passeth” in

Greek is a compound word. The first part literally means *over, above, and beyond*, depicting something that is *way beyond measure*. It carries the idea of *superiority; something that is utmost, paramount, and top-notch; dominant, and incomparable; more than a match for; unsurpassed or unequalled*. The second part means *I have*, as someone who *holds something* in possession. It can be translated *to keep; to possess; to have; to hold; or even to acquire*. Combine these two and God's peace is defined as a peace *so superior that it is held high above* all other types of peace. God's peace is a peace that *transcends, outdoes, surpasses, excels, rises above, goes beyond and over the top of* any other kind of peace. We may try to find or produce peace in other places, but there is no peace like the peace of God.

Another important word in this promise is the action of God's peace "keeping or guarding." In Greek it is a military term that expresses the idea of soldiers who stood faithfully at their post at the city gates *to guard and control* all who went *in and out* of the city. They served as *gate monitors*, and no one entered or exited the city without their approval. Philippi was a garrison town, full of active-duty and retired soldiers. The readers of this letter were familiar with the concept of standing guard and protecting a place or population.

The apostle Paul uses this word to explicitly tell us that God's peace, if allowed to work in our lives, will stand at the gates of our hearts and minds, surrounding our hearts and minds just as a band of Roman soldiers would keep dangerous nuisances from entering a city or from breaking into special, private places. Nothing compares to this powerful, protective, guarding peace that God has positioned to stand at the entrance of our hearts and minds!

Has anyone ever visited the Old Fort at St. Augustine. The Spanish began construction of the Castillo de San Marcos in 1672 and continued for 23 years, making it the oldest masonry fort in the continental United States. Although this fortress changed hands several times through negotiations, it was never taken by force. The walls were made of coquina which was fire resistant, spongy stone that absorbed the impact of cannon balls. The garrison of that fort was secure against external attack.

In a similar way, God promises to guard (keep) our hearts and minds, our thoughts and emotions. When God's peace operates in us, it dominates our mind and our life. Since what is inside us is that which rules us, peace rises up and conquers our entire being. It stands at the gate of our heart and mind, disabling anything or anyone's ability to disturb or gain access to our mind and emotions. Nothing can get past that divine "guard" and slip into our hearts and minds without approval! God's peace protects, guards, keeps, and defends. It goes without question then that if we are experiencing a tizzy of some kind, who opened the door and let it in? And the answer is not God.

The way Paul writes makes the peace of God a conditional promise. Can that be right? Is God's peace conditional? For God, no. For us, yes. God is always willing and ready to provide it, but we have to be open to allowing it to rule in our hearts.

Paul's statement in Philippians can be held alongside Jesus' promise of peace to the disciples upon his departure to ascend to heaven. In John 14:27, Jesus says, **"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."**

In both of these texts, we are told not to be anxious, troubled, or afraid and simultaneously promised the peace of God. In each passage, the order is different. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, says don't be anxious about anything, and the peace of God will guard your hearts. Jesus says, "I am leaving you my peace; do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."

They are both conditional statements. Imagine a parent saying to a child, "We're going to have a great day at Disney World. Stay right with me today and I will protect you from getting lost in the crowds." The parent could reverse the statement and say it this way, "I will protect you from getting lost in the crowds, but you need to stay right with me."

The promise of God's peace, however willing and able God is to provide such peace, appears to be conditional. Conditional on what? John MacArthur says this, "Inner calm or tranquility is promised to the believer who has a thankful attitude based on unwavering confidence that God is able and willing to do what is best for His children". God's peace will protect or keep us as long as we trust Him.

Maybe you have seen the bumper sticker: "Know God, know peace. No God, no peace."

So, if you ever feel like you are dwelling in a parched place in the wilderness, in a salt land where no one lives? No water, no shade, no oasis, no refreshment? That is life lived without the God of peace. No protection. Open to the elements. And then there's the person who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in God. That person is like a tree planted by water. Heat may come, but there will be nothing to fear because its roots are constantly soaking up the water from the stream. Its refreshment is built-in, inner peace and protection transcending all understanding.

*The peace of God in which Paul and Jesus speak has the sense of wholeness or inner completeness that brings stability to a person's walk, regardless of what is happening in his or her life. Not of the kind of peace that comes today and goes tomorrow but of prevailing, or undefeatable, peace. The key to prevailing peace, tranquility that is unending, is found in a relationship with God. When the Lord says, "My peace I give to you," He is not referring to a loan. His peace is a free gift, available to all who wish to experience. Our relationship with God and faith in Jesus Christ opens the door for our hearts and minds to be kept in God's peace.*

*Isaiah 26:3 says, "If we focus our attention on the Son of God, then He will give us perfect peace." That does not mean we are immune to sudden shocks or occasional times when we are*

*thrown off balance by circumstances. But the power of the Lord's prevailing peace is adequate to carry us through anything He allows us to experience.*

*Offering from John 14:27 (Dr. Charles Stanley)*

You may have heard the story behind the beloved hymn, "It Is Well with My Soul." The writer, Horatio Spafford, penned the words after hearing the news that his four young daughters had been lost at sea. How could Horatio Spafford, or anyone, write about the peace of God after such a loss? Horatio, along with being a lawyer, was a Presbyterian elder. Despite his tragic loss, he experienced the peace of God because he had already made a conscious decision to follow the God of peace. Peace guarded his heart and mind, which otherwise might have been devastated beyond hope.

The song begins and we will close on this thought today...

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way;  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say;  
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

Let all God's people say... Amen.