

Advent 2020 Messiah's Message: Guarding Peace
Philippians 4:1, 4-9

For many of us today, this Advent season comes like the calm before the storm. We feel like people stuck in the eye of the hurricane. We have felt the conflict and violence and rage of a past season, but our hearts are disturbed within us. We are waiting for the fury to resume, for the storm to commence once again, only with greater brutality than it did before.

It comes as no surprise to anyone, I think, that Advent 2020, rather than being a season of peace, has become a season of uncertainty, anxiety, and personal as well as social angst. Social conditions under the pandemic undermine economic stability. Weather and environmental anomalies puzzle researchers. Changing cultural boundaries, the devastating abandonment of long endorsed moral institutions not to mention natural disasters and a conflict ridden national election cycle disturb us to the level of personal motivation and daily decision making.

Even though there seems to be less outright violence today than we have seen at other times in the year, the absence of violence has not resulted in the expansion of peace. Why? Why, once the protests settled down or were removed from the limelight, why do we not have a better sense of personal or community peace? It is because peace, especially as the Bible speaks of peace, is more than the mere absence of conflict. Peace is the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual certainty that rules in a believer's life through the Holy Spirit as a result of faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit, and without the Spirit there is not true, lasting peace.

The second Sunday of Advent traditionally recognizes the theme of peace, a theme often described in terms of cultural and social relationships. I want to direct our attention this morning to the fact that lasting, heart guarding peace is **NOT** a function of external circumstances but of the character and sovereignty of God at work in our hearts and lives.

Because the peace we are actually looking for is a work of God within the heart, the greatest threat to peace is not the external, temporary conditions that we experience around us. **The greatest threat to personal peace is a guilty conscience within us.** That is a fact that leads us to ask, "Father, what must you do in us in order for us to have your peace no matter what surrounds us?"

As we pursue the answer to that question, let us first embrace the fact that throughout His word, God promises peace to His people.

Isaiah 26:3 (ESV) *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.*

Micah 5:5 (ESV) *And he shall be their peace.*

John 14:27 (ESV) *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be*

afraid.

Philippians 4:7 (ESV) *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

The peace that God promises is an undisturbed condition of well-being on account of righteousness. The OT word for this peace is *shalom*. Shalom is more than an emotion. It is the experiential result of a right response of humanity to the holiness of God. Peace is what happens when we get right with God.

Let's go back to the beginning, to the garden of Eden again. As long as Adam and Eve walked in faith, and devotion, and trust with God, as long as they maintained a right relationship with their Creator, they experienced peace. But the moment they rebelled, the minute they disobeyed God and sinned and broke His law, the instant they chose to abandon their righteous relationship with the Father, fear replaced love, and guilt replaced peace. They lost *shalom* as a result of sin and a guilty conscience. They knew they were naked and they were afraid. They lost their peace.

The peace of God is that tranquility of spirit that God enjoys and only God can give. God created us for peace, but we abandoned peace for selfishness and sin, and now, without God, there is no peace. And yet, God still promises His beloved people His peace. So, our question becomes more urgent: "Father, what must you do in us in order for us to have your peace no matter what surrounds us?"

The key to true, lifelong, fulfilling peace is faith in Jesus Christ. Paul makes the point for us in Philippians 4:7,

"And the peace of God which passes understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, God come in human flesh, born of a virgin, laid in a manger; Jesus who grew in stature before God and man; Jesus who taught the teachers, and called the preachers, who fed the multitudes, and healed the sick, and raised the dead to life; Jesus who walked on water, who shone with glory, who stood silent before Pilate, who received the condemnation of the crowd; Jesus who gave his body to the whip and the nails and the cross, who died and was buried, and who laid silent three days in the grave; Jesus who satisfied the justice of God in His death and who was raised from the dead by the love and power of God; this Jesus who appeared to the disciples, and ascended to heaven; this same Jesus who is coming back, sooner probably than we think; this Jesus of prophecy and promise and provision, **this Jesus and no other is the key to the peace that you and I long for today!**

Let me set out for you three provisions Jesus makes for you to know the peace of God. Remember that the peace God offers in Christ is an undisturbed condition of well-being on account of righteousness. So, whatever Jesus does, His work must accomplish restored righteousness and must reconcile us to a right relationship with God. Nothing short of these will bring us the peace God promises.

First, let me direct your attention to Colossians 2:13-14.

Colossians 2:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

We who were once without peace because of the guilt of our sin, God made alive together with Christ. He did so by forgiving all our trespasses, all our lawbreaking. Every infraction of God's holiness, every degree, from minor to major, in which we fall short of the glory of God and therefore come under divine justice and condemnation as sinners and lawbreakers, God forgives.

How does God do that? How does God forgive us without violating His own holiness and glory? He does so by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. Think of like this: if you have a mortgage then you have a record of debt against you that bears legal authority over you and your choices. If you fail to meet the terms of your mortgage, you lose your house, your family is on the street, and your credit rating, your ability to make your way in the world moving forward, is greatly compromised. By entering into the relationship with the lender you give yourself to the authority of the mortgage document over your choices.

Every human being who is born into this world comes into this world subject to the law of their Creator. We're born with a spiritual mortgage, and let me tell you. It doesn't take long for us to break the terms. If we reduce the terms of our spiritual mortgage to just two simple statements, we'll know how quickly the spiritual mortgage acts against us.

A man came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what is the foremost of the commandments?" He wanted to know, if you reduce the terms of our spiritual mortgage to the its simplest, most significant statement, what would it be? Jesus said, "The foremost of all the commandments is this, that you love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength."

We might as well stop there. We can hardly draw a breath in this world before we prove that our greatest, dearest, most precious love is not God but ourselves. We are veteran lawbreakers when it comes to loving God more than ourselves, trusting God more than any other, obeying and honoring God in all our thoughts and values and intents, let alone our actions.

And yet, God forgives us by canceling the record of our debt that stands against us. How can He do that? How can He just cancel our debt? What about justice? What about righteousness? This is like us breaking our mortgage and God saying, "No worries, here's another house for you." Someone has to pay the mortgage.

This is what Jesus does. God cancels the record of debt that stands against us, God relieves us of the guilt of our sin, by nailing our sin and guilt to the cross. Jesus pays the mortgage with His life and His death on the cross. Jesus satisfies the legal demands of justice and righteousness and He does this by suffering death on the cross in our place on our behalf. He fulfills the terms of the

spiritual mortgage with His life then takes on Himself the punishment our mortgage breaking deserves, so that, through faith in Him, we who are lawbreakers may have peace with God. The record of debt is removed when God nails that record to the cross.

That brings us to the second provision Jesus makes for us to experience the peace of God. What does God nail to the cross? Paul writes that God nailed to the cross the record of debt that stood against us with all its legal demands. But God didn't nail a document to the cross. It was Jesus, God's Son Who was nailed to the cross. **So how does Jesus fill the role of a legal document?**

Two Scriptures help us understand what Jesus has done for us. The first is 2 Corinthians 5:21, and the second is 1 Peter 2:24.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

God made Christ to be sin for us. Jesus Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross. God treated Jesus on the cross as the sum total of all human sin past, present, and future. Jesus became the embodiment of our sin and received in His body the judgment our sin deserves. And listen, when Christ became sin for us and suffered for us, He fulfilled the promise we mentioned earlier from Micah 5:5 ***He shall be their peace.***

As our substitute and representative, Jesus takes away, on the cross, the guilty verdict the Law and our sin demand. And, if the guilt is removed by Christ, then He becomes not only the embodiment of our guilt, but also the embodiment of our peace.

Which now brings us to the third provision Jesus makes for us to experience peace with God. Peace that is promised and provided for but never applied is no real peace. What good is peace I can't experience? What good is peace that God can have and Christ can have if I can't have it too?

Jesus imposes peace through His indwelling Spirit.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

In this same chapter 14, John records Jesus teaching His disciples that He must leave them, but He would not leave them alone. He would send a Comforter who would not only be with them, but be in them. He speaks of God the Holy Spirit. God actively, personally present in the lives of believers. When we put our faith in Jesus, God fill us with His Spirit, and when the Spirit is present in our lives, stuff happens in us.

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV) ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Peace, among other things, is a work of the Holy Spirit produced by the work of God in our hearts and lives. God gives Himself to those who put their faith in Jesus, and one of the traits God has that He gives to us is peace.

There is so very much more to say about this peace. We ought to take time to explore the effect and benefits of the peace of God in our lives. We ought to examine what Paul means when He says that the peace of God passes understanding (which, at least, means that we don't have to understand all that God is doing in order to experience peace while He's doing it!) We ought to take the time to talk about that it means that God is the God of peace.

But, let me close instead with this. There are some means available to us to rebuild a fortress of peace in our lives in these days. Our peace may have been disturbed, but there are some things we can do in the Spirit of God to restore and maintain our peace. Let me simply list them for you quickly and give you some words to look up and ponder on your own:

First, we maintain the peace of God in our hearts when we remain in Christ no matter what.

John 15:4-7 (ESV) ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Second, we maintain the peace of God in our hearts when we commit to living in the Spirit of Christ.

Romans 8:6 (ESV) For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Third, we maintain the peace of God in our hearts through obedience to God's word.

Psalms 119:165 (ESV) Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.

Finally, we maintain the peace of God in our hearts when we spend time with Christ in prayer and meditation.

Philippians 4:4-9 (ESV) ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be

anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Jesus said, “Ask and it shall be given unto you.” DO you want peace of heart, peace of mind, the peace of God this morning? Ask for it. Ask God for faith in Jesus. Ask God to forgive your sin and take away your guilt. Ask God to put His Spirit within you, to share Himself and His peace with you. Ask God to empower you to live in His presence and persevere in His peace. This is why Jesus has come, to bring you true, lifelong, fulfilling peace, and you have only to ask for it.