

"NOT A BAD WAY TO LIVE"

Philippians 4:1-10

Every once-in-a-while I enjoy finding out what is behind the creation of whatever it is I am looking at or reading, or maybe even singing. This is the case with some of the old as well as some of the new hymns of the church. I find myself asking myself, "What prompted the composer or the artist or the writer or the whoever it is that created whatever it is I am inquiring about to do what they did. There is one piece of music that always puts a lump in my throat when I sing it, but before I tell you or you guess the title of the hymn, let me tell you the story behind its composition.

Horatio Spafford, a businessman in Chicago, sent his wife and three daughters to Europe by ship while he remained back in the States, intending to join them later. En route there was a terrible storm at sea and a shipwreck, during which their three daughters drowned. Mrs. Spafford made it safely and wired back saying, "All of our daughters have been lost. Only I have been saved." He took the next vessel.

As they came near the place where his daughters drowned, the skipper of the ship pointed to the place where the other ship had gone down. It was there on the deck of the ship he wrote these stirring words:

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."

■ John Haggai, *How to Win over Worry*

And the title of that wonderful, that powerful, healing hymn is, "It is Well with My Soul."

"When peace like a river attendeth my way." Let me ask you, do you yearn for peace? Peace of mind? Peace in your home? Peace in a relationship that is volatile? Maybe you have a loved one who is serving in the military over in the Iraq or Afghanistan and you are praying for peace in that war-torn part of the world and that your loved one will come home.

Maybe you desire peace in your heart, a heart that has been upset and is filled with turmoil over a difficult decision you must make that might be related to a job change or relocating or you are not sure if you should take an early retirement. Maybe you desire peace because your heart is heavy and your mind is constantly racing because of something you did or said in the past that you just can't seem to move beyond. Maybe the issue is health related.

I wonder, is there ever a moment in time when you or I can honestly say that we are in a complete state of peace? I really don't think so because, well, we would have to remove all the things that can cause conflict and anxiety in our lives- things like our job, our spouse, our kids or grandkids or nieces or nephews, maybe, I don't know, it's a mother-in-law, or our bills that are piling up, our neighbors, our computers, our e mail, our cell phones, our.... We would have to eliminate just about everything in our lives to have that complete state of peace.

So if we cannot find that time and space where we are living in a utopian state then we have to come to the realization that peace will never come about by eliminating all the things that can cause us anxiety and angst but rather peace will come by centering in on what God would have us focus in on. Someone once said that, "Peace is the calm of mind that is not ruffled by adversity, overclouded by a remorseful conscience, or disturbed by fear." (*Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, p. 431) Friends, in this earthly life of ours, real peace doesn't come our way because there is the lack of a storm, because there will always be storms or a storm brewing, or fast moving winds that could result in a storm. Rather real peace can come when Christ is by our side and when we have our eyes fixed on Him and not on the things of this world. For it was Jesus who said in John 14:27, and listen carefully to what Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Paul gives some **wonderful counsel as to how the believers should live** when he tells them in **verse 1 to, "stand firm in the Lord"** because it is only with the Lord Jesus Christ that a person can resist the temptations and seductions that come our way. So Paul would encourage the believer as well as the church to stand firm in Christ. Paul then says in **verse 2 to, "be of the same mind"** and I say more about that in a minute. Then he says in **verse 4 to, "Rejoice in the Lord always."** Now remember, here is a guy who is in prison when he is writing this letter to the church at Philippi and death is staring him in the eye. He also knows that terrible, dark and dangerous days involving persecution which was around the corner for the Christians in Philippi. So Paul is only saying to them, "Hey folks, I know what I am talking about. I have weighed just about everything that can possibly come our way and yet, through it all, I am still saying, "Rejoice!" And Paul could say this because Christian joy is independent of all everything on earth because the joy for the Christian can be found in the on-

going presence of Christ, because He is always with us, no matter what.

Paul says in **verse 5 to “be gentle” and in verse 6 “do not worry” and to “pray.”** And he concludes **in verses 8 and 9 to “think about these things” and to “keep on doing the things learned.”**

But I want to come back to this subject called peace, which, for so many people seems, to be so elusive and yet, which can be found if you know where to go or, shall I say, whom to turn to find it. Go back with me to verses 2-3 and read with me again what Paul writes. He says, “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.” Folks, something was going down with these two women. There was drama going on and it wasn’t good drama but drama filled with some kind of conflict. So let me give you my main points and then flesh them out, so here goes,

MAIN POINT #1- peace comes through a heart that forgives. Now I

know that forgiveness is sometimes not always too easy to give. Lord

knows we want to receive it when we have been the perpetrator and said or

did, or did not say or did not do something that we know was right. But

here we have two women who are leaders in the church and they are

quarreling, over what, we don't know. But the news of their quarreling has

made it all the way to Paul in prison and he brings the dispute before the

entire congregation- Paul is airing it out in front of the entire church. Now I

don't think for a moment that Paul is trying to embarrass these two ladies by

having their names read aloud in a worship service. But Paul was not afraid

to rally the church and its resources to mend the broken relationship of

these women because the peace of the Church is so crucial. And not only

the peace of the church but a spirit of forgiveness is essential for the

believer.

I wonder, is there anyone that we need to forgive or seek forgiveness from because there is unresolved conflict that is causing us to lose sleep or has driven a wedge between us and the other person or persons?

Unresolved conflict can eat away at a person like a cancer but when addressed and dealt with can be excised so that peace can be restored and unity preserved. That is why Paul says in verse 2 for these two women to, "Be of the same mind in the Lord."

MAIN POINT #2- peace can come through prayer. I don't know what your prayer life is like but praying can be that which gets us through the dark hours of the day or night. The Philippian Christians had a lot to worry about- just everyday living, not to mention the worry of being a Christian which meant taking your own life in your hands. Paul is encouraging the believer to take some things to God in prayer; to take only the big things to God in prayer? No, he says in verse 6, "but in everything

by prayer.” Someone once said, “there is nothing too great for God’s power; and nothing too small for his fatherly care.”

A man was being pursued by a roaring, hungry lion. Feeling the beast’s hot breath on his neck and knowing his time was short, he prayed as he ran. He cried out in desperation, “O Lord, please make this lion a Christian.” Within seconds, the frightened man became aware the lion had stopped the chase. When he looked behind him, he found the lion kneeling, lips moving in obvious prayer. Greatly relieved at this turn of events—and desirous of joining the lion in meditation, he approached the king of the jungle. When he was close enough he heard the lion praying, “And bless, O Lord, this food for which I’m exceedingly grateful!” (*Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, p. 456) I guess you just have to be careful what you pray for, it just might come to pass.

Paul’s encouragement to pray- prayers for ourselves, prayers for others, prayers for forgiveness for the past, prayers for things we need in

the hear-and-now, prayers for guidance and help for the future. There is no magical formula that Paul offers. What Paul wants the believer to do is bringing our entire lives before God- opening ourselves up to God like an open book where we read to him all the printed pages of our lives and leave whatever it is we pray in the safe hands of a loving God who hears and answers prayers. And when we go to God in prayer we can find peace, His peace where there is no fear and anxiety because, as verse 7 says, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Paul gives us some good advice for how we should live. After all, don't we all desire peace? Remember, there is only one true and lasting peace and it is the peace of Christ. Not as the world gives does Christ give to us and it is His peace. Now that's living. Amen.

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Introduction: The story behind the hymn’s composition...

“When peace like a river attendeth my way”- Do you ever yearn for peace?

Is there ever a moment in time when we can say that we are in a complete state of peace?

Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives....”

Paul gives some wonderful counsel as to how the believers should live when...

The subject called PEACE

Main Point #1- **peace comes through a heart that** _____
vs. 2-3

Two women, leaders in the church, and they are quarreling

“Be of the same mind in the Lord”

Main Point #2- **peace can come through** _____ v. 6

Paul’s encouragement- bring our entire lives before God

Conclusion: Remember, there is only one true and lasting peace and it is the peace of Christ