

# Let the Peace of Christ Rule Your Hearts

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, as I looked at these verses when I was preparing that John breathed life into as he just read them for us, I just thought, there is so much you could say. And so I had this really novel idea that I might pray and ask God what God actually wanted to say. So after that great wisdom, I felt there were three things that God wanted to surface for us as a community together.

And they are that God wants us to know his peace. Secondly, we're called to carry the peace of God.

And the third, that we are his chosen people. Now there's three things. One of those is within us, one of those is between us, and the third is between us and God.

Now, have you ever had those moments when something's been building up the pressure of maybe getting some coursework in at school or a project completed or facing a difficult conversation and then it's done, it's closed, and it's all okay. And that relief, as you breathe and you realise tensions bleeding out of tensions bleeding out of you, you didn't know you were holding up until that moment.

A lot of my work is with psychologists and psychotherapists as we work with clients.

And they talk about two main themes here. One is that there are just two emotions, love and fear.

You could boil all emotions down into love or fear. And essentially, peace is a core part of love.

[ 1 : 43 ] And therefore, anxiety, the lack of peace is a part of fear. The second theme they often talk about is how emotion is moving in our body. And when fear and anxiety is in our body, that often we become tense. Shoulders rise up, there's tension in our face and we breathe in a shallow way.

And I think this is a really helpful prompt or clue to notice in our bodies where we might be holding that anxiety and carrying some fear. It's a good clue that actually we need to let go and let God in so we can relax and let the tension and anxiety go and know some peace in that situation.

And I describe that because quite often in our bodies is the clue what's going on in our minds and hearts. And it's a great way of spotting and getting the early signs. And I describe it because I want you to consider where right now you might have something going on where you're more in the anxiety and fear and not enough in the peace of God. And that tension might be in your bodies right now.

And I just want you to consider another Holy Spirit to prompt where you might need God's peace at the moment. Now early in married life with Helen, who's at the back, she's been on the coffee and tea team this morning, the welcome team. Helen was part of a Christian charity doing arts and mission work in schools. And so she was working without a salary and praying in her money every month. And I really felt prompted by God to move into a job where I cut my salary by about 80% to try and get into leadership development work, which I've been doing for the last 25 years. And so we are on very low income at the point. And we really went on a journey of what it means to be actually trusting God.

And Helen was strongly influential. She's like, well, either God is God or God isn't God. If God is God, then we can trust God in our finances and each aspect of our life. And as a part of that, the charity is where the team would often have a scripture of the month, which they would pray into, learn off by heart, and would become a real sort of guiding influence as they did their work.

[ 4 : 28 ] And Philippians 4, verse 4 is a key part of that. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And so we were testing this with, can we not be anxious about not having enough money and truly trust God? And we had this amazing chapter where, I have to say, Helen was the most faith-filled of the two of us, where we're starting to run out of money. And now we could have gone and got extra jobs. We really felt like we were doing the thing that God had prompted us to do. And we felt there was something we've got to learn here, rather than just trusting on having the credit card to go and

get some extra money if we needed it.

And so we went through this journey of saying, okay, we're not going to borrow any money, we're going to stop, we've run out of money, we're going to pray. And I remember the anxiety of sitting there thinking, we don't have the food in the cupboard. We don't have anything in money we can draw on. Are we going to trust God? Are we going to be anxious about this? Or are we going to go, okay, God, let's turn to you and trust you? And we went on this journey several times, and we'd run out of money, there's no food in the cupboard. We stopped and we prayed. And three times, as we sat there praying, we had an envelope come to the letterbox. We got to there, me being of low faith, opened the door, tried to see who it was. In the envelope was some cash that would get us through that week. Three times that happened, and then the whole pattern just seemed to change for us. So I was definitely on a journey of how do I not be anxious? How do I genuinely trust that the peace of God will transcend the fears of the reality around us? And then we had this really key moment when we had bought a car with some money that we had. Then we had an issue with a stone coming through, breaking the radiator, and that sort of bled out the water. The engine overheated and seized.

And then we had no spare cash. So we thought, well, we have a dead car. No use is that. We can't sell it like that. So we can't get any money back from it. So this time, we sort of broke the rule. We used the credit card and we got the engine replaced. I think he would sell it and get rid of that and get rid of the debt and also have some cash left over. So this is the plan. Then we advertised the car for sale. There was just no interest whatsoever. And then the credit card bill is due. And this plan really isn't working. And I remember being a little anxious about this and quite concerned about this.

This isn't, this is a bit of a disaster. Helen being the more faith-filled said, well, let's sit down and pray. So we sat down to pray. Now this car had been advertised for about six weeks. Nothing. We sat there to pray. And in that moment of praying, we stopped. We definitely felt more peaceful. [ 7 : 36 ] The phone rang, literally as we finished praying. And the person calling said, is your car still available? I said, yes. He said, can I come around and see it now? Yes. I'll come around. And this guy rocked up with a load of cash, didn't want to drive it, gave me the cash. We asked, didn't sort of barter, just gave me the cash and took the car. And now clearly in that situation, it's a story of immediate answer to prayer. But it is a story of the peace of God transcending the anxiety and the troubles in the moment. But if I think to later life, when Helen was going through chemotherapy three years ago, and in some of those darkest moments, there wasn't an immediate answer to prayer. But in prayer, we did find a peace that would transcend the very dark moments and the challenges of that time.

And so this is what I believe God wants us to know and experience in the face of difficulty, however large or small, a peace that will rule in our hearts, not anxiety and fear.

And the incredible thing is, on our own, is our effort. But the remarkable thing is we are in partnership with the Holy Spirit. And then there is a gift of God, which is the peace of God.

And in John 14, you read Jesus saying, peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. Not as the world gives, do I give to you. So let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

So this morning, I want to consider, where in your heart are you lacking the peace of God? Where is there some fear, anxiety, or burden sitting with you, where you need the grace and the presence of the Holy Spirit to bring the peace of God? And we'll take some time to really pray about that in a moment.

[ 9 : 57 ] So you're called to carry my peace. This is a very strong message in these verses. There is a remit we are being given as the church, as the people of God, to be peace bearers, carrying the peace and love of God. Now you might know that saying, which is, if you're carrying anger and resentment towards someone else, that is a little bit like slowly drinking poison in the hope that it'll eventually hurt the other person. Are you familiar for some of you? And that's what anger is like, which is, it eats away at us, often with having little impact on the other person at all. Now I was at a Christian festival in the summer, and I noticed how I had been carrying some anger towards someone who I felt was acting selfishly and having a really negative impact on our family. And as I sat there listening to a talk, I realised it really wasn't about them, it's about the way I was relating to it. And I was interpreting their choices as really selfish and negative towards us. As I allowed the Holy Spirit to nudge me and convict me of this, I really noticed that actually they're just making choices which are good for them. There's nothing directly negative intention towards us in any way.

As I realised

I was holding on to this anger, I chose to let it go, and I chose to forgive them and let that go. And an incredible peace of God did start to rule my heart. And the lightness came, the shoulders dropped, the breath deepened, and then I've been living in a peace and some fruitfulness of that since the summer as I'm not carrying that. And as we look through here, there's a very clear challenge to us about how to be with each other as a community. The words that Kate referenced in the prayer and John read.

Let's read. Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bear with each other, forgive as the Lord forgave you, unity, called to peace, be thankful, teach and admonish one another with gratitude.

Gratitudes. All in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks. Thanks. This is an incredible remit that Paul is giving to the church then. And in the context there are factions beginning and people going off and creating some of their own sort of theology in a sense.

So there's context to it. But actually for all of us as a community of God, as God calls us to be peace bearers, those carrying the peace of God, then we have to attend not just what's living with us on a daily basis, but how we're relating to each other.

[ 13 : 08 ] In the work I do with teams, we're often saying it's not so much about who the individuals are, it's about the quality of connection between them. And here there is a message of the quality of connection between us, the love, the grace, the forgiveness, the encouragement, the coming together is a core part of what it means to be this church community, carrying the peace of God for our wider community, carrying the peace of God for our wider community.

And a lovely friend of ours, Tony, used to be a vicar over in Nelsie, had this saying, he said, sometimes you're the only Bible that other people are reading.

And so how much are we modelling these behaviours, these ways of working, this way of thinking? Now on our own, as we're busy and stretched and lots going on and facing our own challenges, and some of those are deep and quite intense, well, the good thing is we're not on our own. We are partnering with the Holy Spirit.

That this peace is a gift from God, something the Holy Spirit can bring to us in Revelation in a profound way.

So again, in a moment we're going to pray, and I'm going to ask you to notice where might the Holy Spirit be nudging you? Where might you need to adjust your relationship to someone else, or where you're carrying?

[ 14 : 39 ] And that actually is more about you relating to it than about the situation. One of the phrases we often use in our work is that we need to take responsibility for how we're experiencing everything.

Third and finally, we are the chosen people. And in here, I think there's a story about who we are in God.

The first point, I think, of these verses is that we are chosen. You know, when you choose, you choose a friendship, or you choose a life partner, then that's going towards someone.

And here I hear God going towards us. There's an intentionality about it. There's a desire for connection. And in that, coming towards, we are known by God.

To explore this, I want to describe an experience I had a few years ago. I had something going on with my heart, which turned out to be okay in the end, but was pretty worrying at the time. And the cardiologist sent me for a particular test.

[ 15 : 56 ] I got put into an MRI machine. And it was kind of a 45-minute MRI. So you're in the tube, trying to listen to radio 4, whatever they had on, while the magnets are banging and banging.

It's kind of hard to hear anything. And trying not to be claustrophobic and telling yourself to relax and just begin to relationship with anxiety. And halfway through, they stop. And then this team come in the room.

And they're called the crash team. And they're in there because in the next phase of this, it's the highest risk of having a cardiac arrest. And so in one arm, they put a cannula.

And they pump dye in. And then in the other arm, they pump this drug, which accelerates your heart rate to close to maximum. And then the team will chat to each other like they're having a coffee break.

And then they walk out of the room. And then it starts. And the magnets start going. And then you feel your heart starting to race, like you're sprinting for your life while you're just lying still.  
[16:57] That's a pretty weird feeling. Then you feel the dye pumping into you. And you can feel it. Some of you must have had the dye around your body at some point. You can feel that flooding your body.

And I'm lying there really strengthening my relationship with anxiety. And then I had this idea, oh, what if I imagine that I'm running?

And I just pictured myself running. And then my brain somehow thought, oh, the heart rate's appropriate for me, sprinting across this field in my mind. And somehow that felt a bit normal. But it was an experience of my body being flooded by these chemicals and these drugs and every part of it.

Now, I'm not recommending this process. But it turns out in the end, my heart is fine, which is very encouraging. I really know it's fine after that. But I want to link this to the day that I gave my life to Jesus, the day I would say I became a Christian.

I'd grown up as a Catholic. But through a really long range of circumstances, I found myself in this church, at the front, with a church leader, giving my life to God.

[18:06] Literally doing the prayer of, I want you in my life, God. And I'm sorry for the things that I do that are so selfish. And self-reference, would you fill my life?

Would you meet with you? I give you my heart. Literally that prayer. And I stood there with my eyes closed, with this, like a praying with me. And I remember I had this experience of a peace of God, like never since.

Touches on it. But it was like that MRI. It was like a drug and chemical flooding me from my toes to the top of my head. Total encounter with a sense of peace, which transcends any sense of what's going on in the world now.

And that is something of the gift of God has for us. We read in Galatians 5, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control, and peace is in there.

A gift from God. And this morning, I'd like us to respond. And notice where it might be that we need a different experience of peace here within us, in our heart, in our mind.

[19:24] Whereas that we might need a sense of greater peace in our relationships with other people. And where might it be between us and God, where we need that greater sense of connection and encounter that would bring a peace that would transcend our understanding and bring peace, whatever the circumstances are that we're facing.

Lord, we ask now, as you hear our prayers, that you would meet with every single one of us in the way we need. Lord, whether we need your peace to fill us now, to banish anxiety out of our minds and hearts and bodies.

Lord, we ask now, as you hear our prayers, whether, Lord, you are needed in our relationship with one another, where we might need to forgive, where we might need to address something and change something.

Lord, in the way we might need that fresh revelation of you and our connection with you that you have chosen us. I ask that, Holy Spirit, you would move, meet with us, and we lift all our prayers to you now in the power and authority of your name, Lord Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.