

PM Philippians 4 "The Peace of God"

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[0:00] And in the Church Bible, that is on page 1181. Philippians chapter 4. Philippians chapter 4.

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[1:49] Philippians chapter 5. will be with you. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you've revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet, it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I've received full payment and more.

[2:55] I'm well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you.

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. This is God's word and he will bless it to us.

Amen. Well, let's turn back to Philippians and chapter 4. And our text for this evening is verse 7 of that chapter.

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

[4:12] Well, I have been privileged. I've had many, many privileges. And one of the greatest privileges that I have benefited from in my life is to be born in a Christian home to Christian parents who brought me up in the faith.

And one of the very many good things about that is to be present at family worship and to hear my father in particular praying especially in the evenings.

and my own father when he prays in the evening very often at the end of his prayer very, very often his thoughts seem to turn to this verse that the peace of God which surpasses all understanding would guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

and as I was preparing for this sermon my thoughts my own thoughts turned to this verse partly because I feel it's an excellent definition of what it means to be a Christian.

To be a Christian is to be somebody who knows the peace of God guarding their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

[5:47] The old version says kept that the peace of God would keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. That's what it means it's a beautiful definition of what it means to be a Christian.

And yet when you look back on your life in the past and when you look ahead to what is to come in the future do you have that sense of peace?

Some people when they look back on what has happened in their lives they look back with a sense of sadness a sense of fatalism they look back and think so many things have not worked out and they look ahead and wonder what else might go wrong and other people look back and they think generally in financial terms they think well I'm making progress because I've accumulated wealth for myself and they look ahead with perhaps a sense of optimism but it's optimism in a very limited sense thinking that they might go on to accumulate more riches for themselves but a Christian looks at life in a completely different way a Christian does not look at life through that lens Christians are called to be servants they're not called to think about themselves they are all in as it is as it were this morning we were thinking about Elisha

Elisha was an all in Christian in a sense wasn't he he put all his eggs in one basket he was called by Elijah and at that moment he sacrificed the oxen that he was plowing with and burned his plowing equipment as part of the sacrifice a Christian is a person who doesn't think about the future in terms of trying to make provision for themselves in that way they think of others they're called upon to be those who as we'll see in Philippians those who have the attitude that to live is Christ and to die is gain they're called to be those who believe that he who began a good work in them will see it to the day of completion in Christ they're called as it says elsewhere in Philippians to be those who are looking for that upward call of God in Christ Jesus what else can that mean other than to be serving him until the last moment and then to be called into his nearer presence in heaven and so as we come to this verse in Philippians we're reminded that we do not need to be anxious about anything and that's perhaps the core message of this whole letter we're called upon in Philippians to imitate Christ in every way and Christ is the supreme example for us in all things and is specifically in the way in which he cast all his cares upon God the Father and so that's the kind of thing we're going to look at tonight trying to get under the skin of this verse as it were that says the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ

[9:49] Jesus so as we consider these verses together we're going to have a quick overview of this letter and then we'll consider what is the peace of God we'll have a think about what it means that it surpasses understanding and then we'll look at how it guards our hearts and minds so a quick scan of the letter then well some of you might have received gifts at some point in your lives I got some gifts it was my birthday a few weeks ago and I got some gifts and when you get a gift one thing my parents taught me to do is fairly soon after you get the gift you should write a thank you letter shouldn't you and one gift that I'm very thankful for tonight is a gift that the

Christians in the church in Philippi sent to Paul they sent him a gift it was a gift of money we assume and it was sent in those days you couldn't send parcels by post and so it was given to a man called Epaphroditus and he took the gift to Paul and Paul when he received the gift he wrote a thank you letter and that's what we have in Philippians and Paul didn't just get the gift and say I got your gift thanks very much hope you're all well he wrote this letter that we have and the reason that he wrote it in this way is because Epaphroditus brought as well as the gift he brought news about how the church in Philippi was getting along and Paul loved the people in Philippi and he cared about them very much and for that reason instead of just writing a quick letter back to them he writes to them a letter that is absolutely full of his care for them full of his warmth towards them he's concerned about them but he wants to reassure them of how much he loves them how thankful he is that they are partnering with him in the gospel work and all of these things are really obvious when we skip through the letter of

Philippians it's not a long letter you could easily read it tonight probably when you get home in full but Epaphroditus also brought news of how the guys were getting on in Philippi and so Paul is concerned for them as well and so he writes to them to address their concerns you can see that as is so often the case some of the problems that happened to be troubling the church in Philippi are

some of the same problems that trouble the church in Scotland today there was opposition and potentially frightening levels of persecution which might have made the Christians in Philippi feel fearful there was dangerously bad teaching within the church and in chapter three Paul uses really strong language church to condemn those who are destroying the gospel by bringing in false teaching this kind of heresy that you can be righteous through your own deeds rather than relying on Christ's righteousness there was also corruption in the church we see in chapter three verse 19 that some people were proud of things that were actually shameful we can see that some sincere believers as we read in at the beginning of chapter four had disagreements amongst themselves some of the folks in the church were suffering some of them were prone to grumble a bit as we see in chapter two verse 14 we're only a small congregation here tonight and even though we're quite small it's probably true isn't it that some of these things at least would be true of us humanly speaking there could be a temptation if you focus on all of the problems and all of the troubles that afflicted the church in Philippi or indeed the church in Scotland or even this congregation here you could be tempted to think it's hardly worth carrying on but that's not what Paul says to the Philippians he says to them the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus and when you read that in the context of this chapter and of this whole book this whole letter hopefully it will become clear why a statement like that makes sense Paul has written this letter to encourage the church at Philippi to imitate Christ to cast their burdens on the Lord as we were singing but what is this peace that is spoken of then what does Paul mean when he speaks about the peace of God well one of the famous prophecies that's often read even in schools around Christmas time is Isaiah chapter 9 where the names of the one who would come as the Messiah the one who would come as God's appointed saviour we read a list of names that will be given to him and one of them is famously the Prince of Peace

[16:19] Jesus is the Prince of Peace and quite possibly many of you might know that the Hebrew word for peace is Shalom and Shalom is not simply the absence of trouble and conflict it's a positive thing it's a word that means completeness and wholeness contentment in every dimension a sense of perfect security contentment with the past a sense of optimism and contentment about the future in a physical and a mental and in a spiritual sense peace and when Jesus himself spoke we understand he spoke Aramaic and so he would have used a word that's basically the same as

Shalom when he says for example in John 14:27 peace I leave with you my peace I give to you or on a number of occasions when he appeared as the risen Lord Jesus after his resurrection to say peace be with you the risen Lord Jesus is using this word for peace which has this positive and complete sense about it and so this peace of God that Paul is speaking of in our text here is a kind of a shorthand for all of the benefits that come through Christ and the main benefit is in chapter 3 verse 9 if you turn back there you'll see not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which comes through faith in Christ the righteousness from God that depends on faith as we were saying this morning the Bible clearly states that Jesus will return as the king of kings and that as we saw in verse 5 of chapter 4 the Lord is at hand that he is coming soon and we all know deep down that there must be some ultimate occasion where we'll have to give an account for ourselves and it's part of what it means to be human to know that and to acknowledge that and yet peace with

God is impossible for anyone who is wondering if they're good enough because Paul clearly teaches that this peace can only come if you have this righteousness which comes by faith and that's the reason why in chapter 3 of Philippians Paul's language is absolutely savage as he attacks those and demolishes their argument those who are trying to argue that you need to earn your way to heaven by observing Jewish rituals and observing the law and observing various ceremonies and practices Paul is savage in his criticism of these people because he knows there's no peace for anyone who goes down that route none at all because the only way to be good enough through that route is to be perfect and no one is perfect as Jesus himself says no one except

Jesus is perfect so the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus this is in one sense in a very real sense it's the result of what we call the atonement Christ offers himself as we read and we didn't read it but Philippians chapter 2 verse 8 I hope it's a familiar section being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross Christ provides that perfect substitute and takes the cost of

our sins and provides this perfect righteousness for us in place of our sinful lives and I mentioned these benefits this morning but I won't hesitate to mention them again look again at 2 14 no not 2 14 must be 3 14 no any of these verses are actually good verses to look at if anyone's looking at them but what I was wanting to draw your attention to is that we're adopted as God's children forgive me trust me that there's a good verse that tells us that in the letter to the Philippians our sins are paid for then and Christ's righteousness is credited to us and we become like Christ in every way knowing this new spiritual intimacy with God the Father and we become as 320 says citizens of heaven and so we see all these benefits that we get from

[22:43] Christ and the theologians have lots of good technical terms for them they speak of adoption atonement justification and when you hear theologians talking like that you might think that it's possible to wrap up all of these things that constitute the peace of Christ into some neat little theological summary but Paul says that the peace of God passes all understanding the truth is you can't wrap it all up in a neat little statement like that what does Paul mean then we've looked at the peace but what does he mean when he says it surpasses all understanding well obviously if it surpasses understanding then I'll be struggling to tell you what that means and as

I thought about how to explain it I thought maybe and I was hesitant at first to do this but maybe I can explain what I mean by saying that you will know it when you see it and that I have seen it I've seen it in the lives of Christians who I've known and for that reason I've decided to share a number of examples of people who I have known who have shown me what it means to have the peace of Christ ruling in their hearts but they've shown me in a way that I'm struggling to explain let me try and explain by telling you some examples I won't mention any living examples by name but the first example is a fairly young woman in Christ who I know who spent her earliest years living in Eastern Europe under communism and her father was a pastor and because of that and because the state the government were trying to suppress Christianity her life was quite difficult and her family had to make quite a number of difficult sacrifices there were very real costs for her to be a Christian even as a young girl and yet whenever I have a conversation with this person if there's something I'm anxious about maybe I'm anxious about the you know all the stuff that the Christian Institute are worried about you think about the you're anxious about what children are being taught in schools you're anxious about assisted dying legislation or sexual ethics and all sorts of things that worry us about the future of the church and my friend just smiles and she has this deep confidence that there's no need to worry about these things because her confidence in God is far stronger than any fear of man and her experience and the experience of her family under a time of persecution means that she knows that these things will probably just be opportunities for faithfulness opportunities for people in the church to shine as lights to endure trials and come through them she has that deeper confidence she's not putting a brave face on things she's genuinely knows this inner peace and so she smiles and it's something that surpasses understanding some of you may have known the late

Ray and Nell McCabe they were a couple who I had the privilege of knowing who devoted their whole lives as far as I could see to the work of Jewish mission mostly in the Glasgow area and there were countless examples in their lives of examples of where doing what was right was costly and yet if you were around them for any length of time you couldn't help notice that they had this inner rejoicing they had a kind of a peace and a serenity about them that was genuine and unshakable and somehow I can't explain it to you because it surpasses understanding I can't give you a simple definition of it but if you'd spent time with them you would begin to understand it my last example of how this peace surpasses understanding relates to the late

Reverend Ian McKenzie and forgive me if I've shared this example before I've referred to it often because it made a very powerful impression on me when I was first married I was in Govan Hill Free Church and one day Ian McKenzie was preaching in that church and there was a lady in the congregation who had learning difficulties and she had recently been bereaved and something that Ian said in the course of his sermon triggered a great outpouring of grief from this woman and because of her learning difficulties and her situation she began to wail and cry uncontrollably and the service couldn't continue because we were in disarray this person was wailing loudly and we couldn't even hear what was being said and without missing a beat

[29:16] Ian McKenzie got down from the pulpit sat beside her and said let us pray and there was an instant outpouring of peace in a way that defies understanding it was an obvious answer to prayer it was evident that the Holy Spirit was at work you could hear a pin drop and Ian was able to resume his sermon peaceful but in a way that defies understanding it surpasses understanding so we see that there is this peace we see that it surpasses understanding in what way then does it guard our hearts and minds I've tried to answer this question in a sense by some of what I've already been saying but what does it mean to have our hearts and minds guarded or kept well one way of helping us when we think about what something means is to think about the opposite and if we do that with this verse we'll have to ask ourselves what does it mean to lose heart for example well if you as a congregation lose heart you'll very soon close we use that language don't we we say his heart wasn't in it and when you say his heart wasn't in it you mean it's a reason why the person gave up why something failed his heart wasn't in it

I hesitate to press the negative to say what does it mean to lose your mind I feel like we perhaps don't need to say that but surely we can take for granted that this is not a prayer or a promise against mental illness or madness or dementia no the contrast here is between anxiety and peace and when anxiety comes so strongly upon a person eventually it takes them to a point where there's a kind of paralysis they're unable to do anything because their mind unhealthily fixates on the thing that they're anxious about and they're eventually unable to do anything good or bad it's unhealthy and that's the opposite of peace so does that help us a bit we want to know what it means the truth of these verses to have our hearts and minds guarded or kept in Christ

Jesus it means it's something very different then the opposite of what we've been considering here and there are two ways in which that functions as we come to a close there's an absolute sense in which we know peace with God I've been trying to speak of that all day actually you can't know peace with God if you're hoping that by being better by being nice being diligent and obeying the ten commandments that you'll eventually be good enough and so if you're not trusting in the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ then you need to start at the beginning and repent and acknowledge your sin and acknowledge your need of a savior one who would live and die and rise again and achieve all of the perfection that you're unable to achieve on your own the Bible says that today is the day of salvation that's the main reason this building is in existence we want to proclaim this message and urge people to believe in the

Lord Jesus Christ many of you here tonight may already be Christians you're already trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins you've already put your trust in him to gain that righteousness that is needed by faith and for you in a sense what this book is saying is that we do not need to worry we do not need to be anxious because an outworking of all that it means that all that Christ has done and all that we will achieve if we imitate Christ is this peace we'll cast our burdens on him and he will give us peace the letter to the

Philippians tells us that he who began a good work in us will bring it to the day of completion we looked at that before and yet as we read through this letter we'll see that we will need to suffer that we will have enemies this life will require you to strive and press on towards the goal it will not be easy it will not be relaxing you'll have to imitate Christ's humility and that will cost you you'll have to empty yourself and count others more significant than yourself and just like the church in Philippi there'll be work to do that you'll be tempted to grumble about and like Paul you might even feel like you're being poured out like a drink offering you certainly need to wait patiently you have to stand firm you must agree with one another but above all the teaching of

[36:21] Philippians is that as we do these things we will know the peace of God guarding our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus Paul says my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus we have these practical instructions at the end of this letter instructing us to imitate the conduct of mature Christians and that the more that we do this the more we will know of this peace the more our attitudes and actions will be instinctive like those who are led by the spirit who turn to prayer instinctively and whose lives and conduct

and choices and words adorn the gospel to make it a beautiful message of peace that reasonableness and gentleness and moderation in our lives would be evident to everyone that we'd be walking adverts for Christ so there we've seen the peace of God that surpasses all understanding that it would guard our hearts and minds in Christ

Jesus may that be true of everyone here today tonight this week and forever Amen a