

Sermon to the saints of God assembled at Topeka – Sunday, August 11, 2019

I would like to start, this morning, with a little chunk of words from JC Ryle – they are not specifically on point to today’s message, but I think they are always on point for us as a practical, spiritual matter to consider.

Above all, I want all Christians to understand what they must expect in other believers. You must not hastily conclude that a man has no grace merely because you see in him some corruption. There are spots on the face of the sun, and yet the sun shines brightly, and enlightens the whole world; there is quartz and dross mixed up with many a lump of gold that comes from Australia, and yet who thinks the gold on that account worth nothing at all? There are flaws in some of the finest diamonds in the world; and yet they do not prevent their being rated at a priceless value. Away with this morbid squeamishness, which makes many ready to excommunicate a man if he only has a few faults! Let us be more quick to see grace, and more slow to see imperfections! Let us know if we cannot allow there is grace where there is corruption, we shall find no grace in the world. We are yet in the body: the devil is not dead. We are not yet like the angels. Heaven is not yet begun (for us). The leprosy is not out of the walls of the house, however much we may scrape them, and never will be till the house is taken down. Our bodies are indeed the temple of the Holy Ghost, but not a perfect temple, until they are raised or changed. Grace is indeed a treasure, but a treasure in earthen vessels. It is possible for a man to forsake all for Christ’s sake, and yet to be overtaken occasionally with doubts and fears. – JC Ryle

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War and Peace – the peace of God

Each earnest believer of Christ - from the time that our Saviour hung on a tree, to this day, and beyond us until the first resurrection and the changing of living Christians’ vile bodies - each of us has a constant, day-by-day, minute-by-minute war going on within our minds and hearts. Each of us, individually, fights never ending battles of conscience: the striving against sin, the mortifying of the deeds of the flesh, the putting off of the old man, the casting down of imaginations that our minds, from time to time, place in higher esteem than does our Saviour, the putting down of pride that rears his ugly head in our hearts intermittently, maybe many times in a single day!

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; 19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: - 1Tim. 1:18,19

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? – James 4:1

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; - 1Pet. 2:11

No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. – 2Tim. 2:4

That constant state of internal warfare, as we are all aware, is the raging, endless battle (while in this tabernacle) between the flesh and the spirit.

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.
– Gal. 5:16,17

Many sermons have been preached from this pulpit on some element of this grand, vital inner drama – all needful because of its minute by minute importance and omnipresence in our minds and hearts. And yet, in the midst of this great and continual war, there is a peace that we are called to – a peace that is reachable, attainable, and not just in a fleeting moment, while we sojourn here in these vile robes of flesh - as pilgrims without true citizenship at this stage of eternity. It is the peace of God I refer to here, and it is amongst the greatest gifts that we have while we are in this fleshly tabernacle.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. – Col. 3:15

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. – Php. 4:6,7

That exact phrase ‘peace of God’ only appears twice, in the aforementioned verses. It is meant and referred to in many other places, but these exhortations specifically speak to a better condition, general outlook and therefore a spiritual perspective that is more heightened in self-awareness – in short, godliness. There is no doubt that troubles, trials and afflictions will follow a soul who loves the Lord in this mortal lifetime. And it is not a foregone conclusion that we always dwell in the peace of God in our consciences, in an overarching sense – otherwise the exhortations of Collosians 3 and Philipians 4 are rendered as unnecessary. And God’s Word teaches us that:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. -2Tim. 3:16,17

We are exhorted to let the peace of God rule in our hearts and keep our hearts and minds. The apostles Paul, Peter, John and Jude all fervently hoped for that real peace to settle in upon the minds and hearts of the other believers who they ministered to, and for that sense of peace to grow and grow in our lives. In what we usually refer to as the ‘salutation’ of several epistles (as well as in closing sentiments), the apostles expressed that fervent hope that God would grant great measures of grace and peace to those fellow believers who they ministered to.

Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. – 2Thes. 1:2

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, 3 according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: - 2Pet. 1:2-3

These are not just very polite, well-spoken greetings - the fervent hope – and parallel exhortation expressed here is that peace is ‘multiplied’ (or growing, continually) in the hearts of God’s people through an ever-heightened knowledge of God (which a man receives through grace). One side note - on the phrase ‘that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature’, Gill has some good, clarifying words for us:

not essentially, or of the essence of God, so as to be deified, this is impossible, for the nature, perfections, and glory of God, are incommunicable to creatures; nor, hypostatically and personally, so as the human nature of Christ, in union with the Son of God, is a partaker of the divine nature in him; but by way of resemblance and likeness, the new man or principle of grace, being formed in the heart in regeneration, after the image of God, and bearing a likeness to the image of his Son, and this is styled, Christ formed in the heart, into which image and likeness the saints are more and more changed, from glory to glory, through the application of the Gospel, and the promises of it, by which they have such sights of Christ as do transform them, and assimilate them to him; and which resemblance will be perfected hereafter, when they shall be entirely like him, and see him as he is:

The initial peace that comes from our consciences being wiped clean upon our calling grows the more we grow in our knowledge of God.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. – Heb. 10:22

The Lord has assured us that He has left us with His peace:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. – John 14:27

The more closely we examine the divine attributes of God, the more of *His peace* we can enjoy. The hope is that we begin seeing our own rationalizations for looking at things through this vile flesh fade from view over time. The hope is that we begin to realize how dangerous it is to look to define ‘peace’ as being ‘at ease,’ or having a problem-free, prosperous lot.

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. – James 4:8

When we grow in understanding of the depths and riches of God’s love toward His elect, His sovereignty and providence, our minds and spirits will begin to rest in His power and wisdom more and more – becoming far less troubled by mere circumstance, no matter how outwardly troubling.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Rom. 8:38,39

We can then begin to understand that He really has, does and will make all things work together for our good.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. 31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Rom. 8:28-33

Concerning the first verse of this passage – it is so soundly bolstered in beautiful scriptural logic by the verses that follow from it and should be looked in that context. But the fact is that nearly any of us can apply this verse to others, or to ourselves when our path is straight. To apply this to our circumstance of affliction, or the crooks in our lot, is an instance of living in the peace of God. We all know, in the abstract, that God’s sovereignty and the workings of His divine providence, causes all things to come to pass. But resting in the peace of that beauty, power and absolute sovereignty is another matter. As we grow in knowledge, we begin to see, as a matter of great comfort (again, especially in our own circumstances), that all His purposes will be accomplished, and that man’s puny, selfish ‘wisdom’ is vain (including our own).

The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. – Ps. 33:11

There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand. – Pro. 19:21

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? – Isa. 45:9

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it. – Isa. 46:9-11

Certain attitudes make it a certainty that the peace of God *cannot* rule in our hearts. When we equate our ‘trust in the Lord’ with the presumption that God will outcomes that are pleasant to us, or put us into situations that we desire for ourselves, or because we (sometimes vainly) convince ourselves that the situations we desire will work for the best and greatest good of the church (and so that’s why we really want them), we set ourselves up not only for disappointment, but for spiritual atrophy. Trusting in God doesn’t mean trusting that God will provide the outcome that makes the most sense to us, or gets us what we want, or benefits us in some way that our eyes of flesh may see. Trusting in the Lord means we have set our hearts to believe that God’s outcome is not only what is always best - but is in fact what ultimately comes to pass, - whatever the outcome. When we insist on being in control, or ‘working’ a matter - even through our veneers of faithfulness - we absolutely cannot live in the peace of God and we absolutely are not letting the peace of God rule in our hearts. When we choose worry rather than faithful, obedient submission, we cannot live in the peace of God. These are all instances of ‘leaning to our own understanding’ and are antithetical to trusting fully in the Lord. These are all relatively easy things to say to others, but very trying to say to ourselves, or have others say to us – though they be absolutely right! Christ warns us about fear and worry often:

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. – Matt. 6:34

And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. – Luke 12:29

And we normally don't do this – that is, until tomorrow looks murky or unsure to us personally (in any way). This is when we are in the greatest need of applying it to our hearts – upon our beds – that the inner man may truly embrace this as a matter of individual faith in God that allows for the peace of God to rule in a man's heart!

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. – Php. 4:6

The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe. – Pro. 29:25

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. – Mt. 10:28-32

Worry and fear are the enemies of peace. But you can't stop worrying by just telling yourself to stop worrying. A worrying, fearful or anxious outlook can only be displaced or overtaken in the heart of a man by the peace of God – and that is only accomplished in those who diligently seek His face. God commands that we (in our consciences – the inner man) cast our cares upon him, and thus – let go of them.

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. – 1Pet. 5:7

You can't cast a thing away from you and yet hold onto it at the same time!

One time I ran across what I think is a pretty good comparison to living in the peace of God. Think of the petals of a flower unfolding in the morning sunlight. The petals of peace in our lives unfold more and more as we learn more about God (and why therefore worry and fear are the enemies of that peace). We discover that God is ALWAYS faithful. We discover that He ALWAYS knows everything, and therefore everything related to our lives, minds, hearts, needs and fragilities (Matt. 6:8). In everything – in ALL things and circumstances relating to our lives, we see and experience His continual goodness – when we don't, we are looking at our circumstances wrong (and/or defining 'goodness' wrong). Living in the peace of

God is refusing to allow our ever-changing circumstances to determine our level of contentment – relying instead upon our understanding of the love, mercy and attributes of God, who never changes.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. – James 1:17

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. – Mal. 3:6

When we begin to develop a lifestyle, or habit, of making the Lord our refuge – FIRST AND FOREMOST, AND NOT AS A LAST RESORT - it is then and only then that we begin to live in the peace of God.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. – Ps. 46:1-3

Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah. – Ps. 62:8

Making that commitment of mind and heart, in the inner man, is key to living in the peace of God.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. – Ps. 91:1,2

The inner man, when we are upon our beds, with no one to convince that we are ‘doing well’, in the middle of our hearts – that is where we go to meet with God. When we go there, in earnest – often, and live there, hiding away under His shadow, staying in constant communion with Him, our hearts can remain living in the peace of God – regardless of outwardly mean or troubling circumstances. And when we learn to cry out to Him in times of trouble – not only to lift the burden (if He wills), but to give us peace in the midst of it – we begin living in the peace of God. The peace precedes the trouble, or the prosperity. It is not determined by either of them. It is determined by how we really see God in the inner man – the

man of the heart – not how we merely understand God intellectually – or apart from how much we allow our circumstances to dictate our real sense of ‘well being’.

JC Ryle: How would the great work of sanctification go on in a man if he had no trial? Trouble is often the only fire which will burn away the dross that clings to our hearts. Trouble is the pruning-knife which the great Husbandman employs in order to make us fruitful in good works. The harvest of the Lord’s field is seldom ripened by sunshine only. It must go through its days of wind, and rain, and storm.

The more deeply, readily and consistently we seek the face of God, consider and learn of His attributes, and lay them up in our hearts as the true and real basis for our reality – that firm foundation of Christ upon which we build the ‘houses’ of our lives, the more we are able to let the peace of God rule in our hearts. That ‘*grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord*’ is a function of the grace of God working in our hearts to compel us to know more of Him. That compulsion, or instance of grace, may take differing forms. But we see the Holy Spirit, through the apostle’s pen, indicate that it is not only amongst the greatest of spiritual gifts, but one that is exhorted to by the knowledge of God – not just an awareness of who He is, or knowing the ‘broad strokes’ but the heightened intimacy that comes with a thirst and hunger for knowledge of Him.

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, 23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. – Eph. 1:17-23

The peace of God is a real thing to attain to (with God’s grace). It has layers to it. It is one way of describing the life’s work of a Christian and should certainly head the

list of pursuits of a Christian. The benefits are innumerable – and the detriment of not having your heart ruled by the peace of God ends in trauma, grief and despair.

Ryle: Many [people who are truly God's elect] get on very well so long as they have no trials. They follow Christ very tolerably in the time of fair weather. They fancy they are trusting Him entirely. They flatter themselves they have cast every care on Him. They obtain the reputation of being very good Christians.

In short, the peace in these instances is not truly the peace of God, but rather the general lack of negative commotion, the positive vibe and attention we receive from others and the receiving of pleasant things that feels like peace but is counterfeit, even in a true Christian.

Ryle (continued): But suddenly some unlooked-for affliction assails them. Their property makes itself wings and flies away; their own health fails; death comes up into their house; tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word; and where now is their faith? Where is the strong confidence they thought they had? Where is their peace, their hope, their resignation? Alas, they are sought for and not found! They are weighed in the balance and found wanting. Fear, and doubt, and distress, and anxiety break in upon them like a flood, and they seem at their wits' end. I know that this is a sad description: I only put it to the conscience of every real Christian, whether it is not correct and true?

There is nothing circumstantial about having the peace of God rule in our hearts – in that mode our hearts transcend circumstance, having fully trusted in God. Our hearts are not turned away from attending on God – and our trouble, which the scripture calls light and momentary, is handled and does its work on our hearts in His Providence. The trouble is no longer perceived as great boulders crashing in on our heads – that they ever were in the first place is the product of our lack of trust in God, and therefore our inability to live in the peace of God. And living in the peace of God, we can grieve for the affliction of Joseph (our brothers and sisters) and not have that grief dwarfed by the size and might that we build our own trouble into in a weakened, peaceless heart. Understanding begets understanding (again, with God's grace), that we can more fully see how much instruction our hearts need and how bountiful the Lord's supply of it is.

***...but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.
17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more***

exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. – 2Cor. 4:16-18

I love you all and pray for multiplied grace and peace of God upon all our hearts.