

**September 27, 2009**  
**Pentecost 17**  
**Philippians Sermon Series**

*“Protecting Our Minds with the Peace of Christ”*

**PHILIPPIANS 4:6-9**

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*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

“The God of peace will be with you.” Think of the comfort found in these simple words. “The God of peace will be with you.” Do you ever have days when you worry more than you should? “The God of peace will be with you.” Is your mind affected by problems in your family or in your personal life? Are you worried about your mind slipping when you grow older? “The God of peace will be with you.” Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

A severe blow on your head can alter your mind, but it cannot change the peace you have in Christ. Prescription drugs can alter your mind, but they cannot change the peace you have in Christ Jesus your Lord.

There was once a man named Phineas Gage who worked as a foreman on the railroad in the 1850's. He had the job of tamping the gun powder into the holes that were drilled to break up rock. One day he pushed his tamping rod into the hole and the gunpowder exploded. A three foot long one inch wide tamping rod pierced his eye and went through the frontal lobe of his brain. His coworkers thought he was dead. Somehow he recovered and even returned to work with only one good eye. But the handsome young Phineas Gage was never the same. The easy going fellow would have sudden outbursts of rage and anger. His coworkers simply said, “Gage was no longer Gage.” His mind had been altered by a three foot tamping rod.

It does not take a freak accident such as this to alter our minds. Drugs, alcohol, poor diet, lack of exercise, chemical imbalances, sleep deprivation; even certain strains of flu can alter our minds and change them. Have you ever taken a long afternoon nap, and then felt sort of lost and empty and forlorn? External circumstances can alter and change our mind, but God will protect our minds with the peace we have in Jesus.

**The peace that comes with prayer**

There is a very special peace that comes to us when we go to the Lord in prayer. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." We think of Jesus' well known words about worry in Matthew 6 where he said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" Then he directed our attention to how our heavenly Father takes care of the birds of the air.

Anxious moments come when we start worrying about our children, our health, our financial condition or the future. These worries begin to affect our minds if they are prolonged and they do not go away. One experienced doctor analyzed the lives of his patients who were chronic worriers. He discovered that 40% worried over things that never happened, 30% worried about past events which were now behind them, 12% worried about sickness even though they were healthy, 10% worried about other people and only 8% worried about real problems confronting them. We must admit there are days we worry way too much and pray way too little.

What glorious peace is yours and mine when we take our worries to our heavenly Father in prayer. "But in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Notice it says, "In everything... present your requests to God." Big worries, small worries and everything in between, no worry is too small and too insignificant to take to our heavenly Father. We have the privilege of taking our worries to our all powerful God. As we sang in the Psalm this morning, "I lift my eyes to the mountains, where shall come my help? My help comes from the One who has made the heavens and the earth, the Maker of heaven and earth."

During times of worry our minds can play tricks on us and tell us that we are not worthy to go to the Lord in prayer. Our faith is weak or we have a burden of sin from our past life that shames us and keeps us from praying. Listen to the words of Romans 5: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." We have direct access to God in prayer through Jesus. We have been justified through faith. What peace this brings even when our minds are troubled.

### **The peace that comes from forgiveness**

An even greater peace comes to your mind when you stand in awe of a God who has found a way by his grace and mercy to forgive you of all your sin.

"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." The night of his resurrection Jesus appeared suddenly to his frightened and worried disciples. He spoke these comforting words to them: "Peace be to you." Then he showed them the nail prints in his hands and it says that they were overjoyed to see the Lord. The peace of God that protects your heart and mind is the

peace that Jesus won for us on the cross and with his resurrection. The nail marks in his hands are the supreme evidence this peace is real and lasting.

Paul reminds us that this peace with God that we have with Jesus transcends all understanding. It seems to our human minds to be too good to be true. Our human minds look for peace in money and possessions. "If only I had more money I would be happy and have more peace." We look for peace in our relationship with other people and the friendships we establish. We even look for peace inside of ourselves. That is why people turn to meditation and other forms of thought and mind control. The real peace of knowing God loves me in this life and for all eternity is possible only in Jesus. It transcends all human understanding because it is something God has planned for us from all eternity.

Permit me to illustrate this with a story about a dog that once lived next door to the church. It was a huge dog, a Rottweiler that would come to the fence and bark viciously every day that I picked up the mail. Some nights if I worked late in the office, I was worried that the dog might be out of the yard and attack me. So, I started talking to the dog, when it came to the fence as if it was my best friend. It didn't take long act more friendly. It began to wag its tail, but I wasn't quite ready to reach my hand through the fence to take the friendship to a higher level. We may be able to establish friendship with dogs by showing them kindness and love, and also with people. My human understanding suggests I can also do this with God, but it does not work. Once we fall short of God's glory through sin, we cannot restore that relationship because our puny efforts at pleasing God also fall far short of his glory. The late senator Edward Kennedy describes in his recently published memoirs that he made an effort to redeem himself for his past sinful life by showing greater kindness and love to people. This may work with people but it does not work with God.

The peace we have in Jesus actually protects our hearts and minds. Jesus will keep us in that peace even when our hearts and minds become troubled. Do you know the words Jesus spoke prior to saying, "My peace I leave with you?" He told his disciples, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." The Holy Spirit teaches you about the peace you have in Jesus, and then the Holy Spirit helps you remember this peace. It is the Holy Spirit who takes our troubled minds and says, "Look at the nail marks in the hands of Jesus. Let that be your assurance the peace you have with your God is real."

### **The peace that comes with pure thoughts**

Paul writes, "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable- if anything is praiseworthy- think about such things. Whatever you have heard from me- or sin in me- put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." Our minds are like a sponge. I can take this sponge place it into a clean bucket of water and it will absorb the water. I can also take it into a bucket of dirty water and it will absorb the water. Your mind can be used to absorb things of this world or things of God. Things which are pure and lovely will always bring us greater joy and peace of mind.

Permit another illustration. I am holding in my hand a plastic bottle. How can I get the air out of this bottle? I cannot tip it upside down, or try to suck it out with a vacuum. But I can fill it with water and the water will occupy the space and the air cannot get into the bottle. When we fill our minds with God's Word, it replaces bad thoughts that take our peace away and replaces these bad thoughts with good thoughts. The morning news has a way of filling our minds with bad thoughts, while the Word of God has a way of filling our minds with good thoughts, "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable." "The God of peace will be with you."

Whatever happened to Phineas Gage? Well, he joined the Barnum and Bailey Circus. Last July they discovered an old picture of him that showed him handsomely dressed, blind in one eye and holding on to the three foot tamping rod that went through his brain. You don't know what future events might alter your heart and mine, but you do know who holds your future. Today begins another week of life on this earth. The Lord will protect your heart and mind with the peace you have in Jesus. Amen.