*DEVOTIONAL*

December 4 - 9

*The Peace of Christ*

**Monday, December 4 Isaiah 9:2-7**

*“His ever expanding peaceful government will never end”*

 The world today is consumed with a desire for peace and a fear of war. Not the least of the trouble spots is the Middle East. Peace there has been the pursuit for centuries. Stronger countries believe that peace must be negotiated from a position of power; radical groups believe that terror will force the issue. But we are left with a more dangerous and more frightening world than ever before. And we are left wondering if anyone is really interested in peace and righteousness and justice for all, or just in securing their own interests?

 The problem is the presence of evil. It sets brother against brother, and nation against nation. Ultimately, the world’s gloom and despair is linked to spiritual darkness. The Bible comforts and reminds those of us who have come to trust in Jesus Christ not to despair as if there was no hope. Against the background of the prophecy of war and destruction, darkness and gloom, Isaiah gave the prophecy about the Messiah. We believe that Jesus Christ is that Messiah. This Messianic Prophecy holds out hope for peace and righteousness through the reign of Jesus the Messiah.

*We pray for the day, Jesus Messiah, when your peace will reign everywhere. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 5 Psalm 122:1-9**

*“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem”*

 Our attitude toward God will determine our view of worship. Going to the house of the Lord can be a chore or a delight. What the temple in Jerusalem was for the Israelites, the church should be for us today. The Israelites went up to Jerusalem three times a year to the great festivals. A pilgrim attending one of these religious festivals rejoiced to worship with God’s people in God’s house. As this chapter begins we find a group of pilgrims very excited, singing this psalm, as they make their ascent to the “City of God.”

 The psalmist was not praying for his own peace and prosperity, but for that of his family and friends in Jerusalem. This is an intercessory prayer on behalf of others. The peace sought in these verses is much more than the absence of conflict. It suggests completeness, health, justice, and protection. The world can’t provide this kind of peace. Real peace comes from faith in God because he alone manifests all the characteristics of peace.

*Too often, Lord, I am quick to pray for my own needs and desires, and omit praying for others. I want to make it my practice to pray for the peace of the world every day. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 6 Ephesians 2:11-18**

*“Christ himself has made peace between us”*

 The apostle Paul reminds these Gentile Christians of their former identity. They were spiritually unclean because they did not keep the Jewish law. The Jews made it painfully clear to the Gentiles that they did not belong to the covenant community of Israel, derisively labeling them as “The Uncircumcised.” The former condition of these Gentile Christians is summed up in these awful words: “having no hope and being without God in the world.” They were separated from Israel physically and separated from God spiritually; in other words, they were “far away.”

 But now in Christ Jesus those who previously were “far away” have been brought “near” by the blood of Christ. He is our peace. When he died on the cross he destroyed the source of the division by making available forgiveness for everyone, Jew as well as Gentile. We do not experience the same division between Jew and Gentile in our church today, but do we hold on to other divisions based on political or socio-economic differences? While the issues may have changed, the principle is still the same: in Christ, we are to live in peace with one another.

*Thank you, Jesus, for being the source of our peace with one another. Amen.*

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**Thursday, December 7 Philippians 4:4-9**

*“The peace of God . . . will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”*

 Anxiety, worry, confusion of mind, pressures of daily life, and uncertainty about the future are all problems we experience. Anxiety, in the way Paul is using the term, and the way we most often experience it, is the futile, frustrating, debilitating attempt to bear the burdens of life and especially of the future, ourselves, alone. The Christian answer to anxiety is confident prayer which brings about “the peace of God.”

 Paul’s offer of prayer is not an easy solution; this is not a magic formula, a mere bedtime repetition of words that we have labeled prayer. He is talking about the serious business of bringing our lives before God, examining our dependence upon God, placing our lives in God’s hands to be used by him, remembering and celebrating what God has already done. When we pray in this manner, we receive God’s peace which gives us hope and confidence, strengthening us to carry on with joy when the burdens are heavy and the pathway rough. Thus, God’s peace becomes an inward sentinel guarding our hearts and minds against disrupting anxiety.

*Dear Jesus, I will be prayerful about everything, thereby anxious about nothing. Amen.*

**Friday, December 8 Numbers 6:22-26**

*“The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace”*

 *God keeps his people*.  Security is God’s first blessing, given to all who trust in him. Insecurity was the mark of Eden. God's face shone, his face was lifted up upon Adam and Eve, but he warned them there was danger in the midst of all their blessings. The danger was to trust someone or something else, including themselves, more than they trusted God. The result was the loss of blessing.

 *God is gracious to his people*.  He heaps on them tokens of his favor, just as one friend heaps presents on another. If we see one person enjoying a great number of gifts from another, we judge that he is regarded with special kindness.

 *God gives peace*.  His face turned toward us when he saved us from our sin. There is a look of God which fills with dismay, and makes humanity call to the mountains to hide them from his presence. But there is a look of God which fills the soul with peace as he says to it, "I am your salvation.” Our restless soul has found its rest in God.

*I rest in your love, Father, for you have blessed my soul with peace. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 9 Colossians 3:15-17**

 *“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts”*

 The New English Bible renders it, “Let Christ’s peace be *arbiter* in your hearts.” This is a colorful picture that comes from the athletic arena, and Paul is literally saying, “Let the peace of God be the umpire of your heart.” Our hearts are arenas of conflict and competition. All sorts of feeling clash within: jumbled up passion and love, fear and hope, jealousy and trust, cynicism and goodwill, indifference and concern, suspicion and confidence. How are all of these feelings to be arbitrated, to be harmonized? What or who is the umpire to settle the clashes?

 Let Christ be the umpire. Not only is he the arbiter of all my inner clashings, of the civil war that rages inside me. He is also the one who can umpire in my interpersonal relationships, in my family, in the world and in the church; in him we have the key factor for our getting along together – his decision will always be based on his primary criteria: what response reflects love for God and love for neighbor? Decide that and act on it, and the peace of Christ will “rule” in every dispute.

*You have called me to live in peace, Lord, so rule in my heart. Amen.*