

JEHOVAH SHALOM

I saw something a few weeks ago on Facebook. A wise man said to me! "The way to achieve inner peace is to finish all the things you've started." So I looked around the house to see all the things I started and hadn't finished ... and before leaving the house this morning I finished off a bottle of red wine, a bottle of white, the Prozac, some Valium, some cheesecake and a box of chocolates. You have no idea how good I feel right now! As we continue in our series Revealed today we come to another name that God has given us to call Him by;

Judges 6:22-24 When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!" 23 But the LORD said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die." 24 So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

People talk a lot about peace of mind these days. A quick search on Google brought up 966 Million results. So many today do not feel at peace. They carry a high degree of stress, anxiety and tension. As a pastor I have seen that there are 3 things that tend to rob us of our peace.

The first is circumstances that are uncontrollable. There are a lot of things that happen to us in life that are beyond our control.

The second is people that are unchangeable. There are people that just naturally resist change. No matter how much you wished and try to make them different, they stay the same.

The third is problems that are unexplainable. Life is not fair and it often does not turn out the way we want it to. You will never know why some things happen in life, and the more you try the more unsettled and frustrated you will become.

God has promised us peace of mind because it is a fundamental need that all of us have. That is why He has given us the name Jehovah Shalom, the Lord is peace. The most used greetings in the New Testament are grace and peace. Why? Because we all need both of them. Before Jesus left us He promised us that His peace would be with us;

John 14:27 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.

Jesus offers all of us the gift of peace. It is something that we often talk about during the Christmas season. So how do you receive God's gift of peace? It is not found in the absence of conflict. Peace has nothing to do with living a problem free life. Jesus promised us that in this world we would have troubles. So how can we have peace of mind *in* the conflict? Peace of mind is the result of three important decision that you have to make. Three choices. The choice of acceptance, the choice of trust and the choice of surrender.

1. God's Presence – accept what cannot be changed

Worrying about what cannot be changed certainly won't give you peace. Becoming resentful or bitter about what cannot be changed will certainly not give you peace. Feeling guilty or having self-pity about things that cannot be changed will not give you peace.

There is only one thing that will bring peace in your life and that is acceptance. Acceptance of what cannot be changed. Remember the story of when David and Bathsheba's first child died?

2Sa 12:19-23 David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked. "Yes," they replied, "he is dead." 20 Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate. 21 His servants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!" 22 He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' 23 But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

King David had a young baby that was dying and he tried everything he could. He laid down on the floor of his house and fasted and prayed for 7 days. He wept and pleaded with God to save the baby, but on the seventh day the baby died. God did not answer his prayer. I don't know why. Someday maybe we will learn why He did not answer that prayer, maybe not.

When David's advisers heard that the baby had died they were scared to death. They thought, "This guy's nearly over the edge with the baby near death. When he finds out the child has actually died, he may lose it!" But David heard them whispering and finds out the child is dead. So he got up and went and took a bath. He put on clean clothes. He ate a big meal. And he went back to work.

The advisors did not understand why he acted that way. David explained, "The child has gone to heaven. One day I will join him there, we will be reunited in heaven. In the meantime, there is nothing else I can do. So I have got to get back to work." He accepted what could not be changed.

Acceptance is a learned experience. You learn it by going through tough times. You learn to accept through experience. It is a choice and the presence and power of God helps us through it. You are never going to learn to really accept the things of life without God's power in your life.

One of the primary things in life that makes us lose our peace, that keeps us tense and nervous and stressed out about the things in life is our demand for an explanation. When something goes wrong in life the first thing we ask is why. Why did you allow this to happen God? Why is this happening to me?" By going over and over it in your mind trying to figure out why something happened, you are kept yourself in turmoil. Why is this a problem? Because it accomplishes nothing.

First, God doesn't owe us an explanation. We are the creation, He is the creator. He is not obligated to explain everything that He does to us. We know from experience that God is good and that God is fair. God loves us perfectly and wants what is best for us.

Second, even if God did explain to us why things happen the way they do, we would probably not understand it. God is infinite, we are finite. God sees and understands things that we do not. There are forces at work in the world and in our lives that we have no clue about and cannot comprehend.

Third, even if we did understand the reasons, that would not bring us peace. Sometimes we think that if could just figure out why this happened, then it would make sense and bring us peace.

No, it will not. Just knowing why something happened does not bring us peace. You will still feel resentful or bitterness or anger or whatever. Explanations never satisfy.

What comforts us is the presence of God in our life. Not God's explanations, His presence. God's care, concern and comfort. Remember the story of Job. He was wealthy and had everything in the world going for him. Then he lost it all. In a 48 hour period all ten of his kids were killed. Then he lost all his wealth, his crops were destroyed. His flocks and herds were lost. He went bankrupt and lost everything. Then, as if that weren't enough, he got a terrible, painful disease that left open soars on his body causing him pain 24 hours a day. The only thing that he was left with was a wife who nagged him! Her tender words of comfort, "Why don't you just curse God and die?" That's what I call emotional support!

When you read through the book you see that the most difficult thing about what had happened to Job was that there was no apparent reason for it. No explanation was given. Job could not see what was happening in the heavenly realm. All he had was 3 friends who kept trying to get him to admit that he was at fault. For 37 chapters God says nothing. Have you ever felt like that? You have a crisis in your life but God seems silent? You ask God for an explanation but you get no answer? It was a test. Job said;

Job 13:15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him ...

It is easy to say, it is hard to live out. Did he really mean those words? Here is the point of the story: When God is silent you need acceptance.

Remember when you were in school and you had to take a test? The teacher is always silent when a test is being given. You can count on that in your life. God is not going to give you the answer in the test. You might get it later. You might not ever get it until you get to heaven, but you're certainly not going to get it *during* the test.

Many have heard the Serenity Prayer. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

That is a very famous prayer by a man named Reinhold Niebuhr. But it is edited. There are eight more lines to the Serenity Prayer that you may never have heard. That's where all the power is. The power of peace is not in the first part of the prayer. It's in the part you do not usually hear.

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time enjoying one moment at a time And accepting hardship as the pathway to peace. Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is not as I would have it. Trusting that You, God, will make all things right if I surrender to Your will So that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen."

It makes a little bit of difference, doesn't it? All of the power is in the second part of the prayer. It is through acceptance, trust, the surrender that you find the path to peace. God says this is the starting point to peace—accepting what can't be changed.

2. God's Plan – trust His perfect care

None of us will have a problem-free life. It just does not happen. We are fallen people who live in a fallen and broken world. There is always something that will rob us of our peace. It is like the guy who spins the plate on the sticks. You can get only so many going until you have to go back and keep the ones you have already spinning to keep spinning. Sooner or latter, the plates will drop.

Pro 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Why is my life just one problem after another? There are three reasons:

First, we live in a fallen and sinful world. God gave Adam and Eve a choice. When they sinned all of creation was affected. Sin and death entered into the world and we have been paying for it ever since. There are consequences of living in a fallen world. There is disease, genetic defects, parasites and cancer. Because all of creation fell there are earthquakes, tornados and other natural disasters.

Second, we have an enemy named Satan who wants to destroy us. Evil is not just an impersonal force, it is a person. The devil is real, and if you are a child of God then he hates you. He wants to mess with your mind and your health and your family.

Third, we all make our own mistakes. We all blow it now and then. Many if not most of the problems and pain in our lives come from the consequences of our own poor decisions. We reap what we sow. Sin always has consequences.

In this world we will have problems. Sometimes they are because of our own mistakes, sometimes they are caused by other.

John 9:1-3 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

As Jesus and His disciples were walking down the street they saw a man who was born blind. The disciples looked at the man and said to Jesus, "Ok, Lord, who sinned? This man or his parents?" Implying that he had this problem because of sin.

That is often what we do today. The first thing we do is to look for someone to blame. When they asked Jesus whose fault it was, Jesus said, 'Neither.' It's neither the man's fault or the parents' fault. The man was blind simply because he was born in a fallen world where people are born blind. It was no one's fault, but Jesus was going to use it so that the power of God might be displayed in his life.

All of us are born into this world broken and blind. From the moment we are born we start down a road that eventually leads to death. Along the way we will all stumble and sin. No matter what the problem, it is not about us, it is about Jesus. Will our lives show what the power of God can do?

There was a downtown church in a city that was having a communion service. The people were asked to come forward and kneel to be served communion.

There was a judge for the Supreme Court that attended that church who went forward and knelt at the altar. Beside him knelt a former burglar who that same judge had sent to prison 10 years before. While in prison, he had given his life to Christ and was now in ministry work in the inner city.

After the service, the judge was talking to the pastor at the door. The pastor said to him, "Did you notice who was kneeling beside you at Communion this morning?" "Yes" the judge said. The two of them stood there for a moment in silence and then judge said "What a miracle of grace." The pastor nodded in agreement. "Yes, God certainly did change that criminal's heart..." The Judge said, "I think you misunderstood me pastor. I was not speaking of the other man, I was speaking of myself. That man grew up in poverty. He had every reason in the world to turn to Jesus for salvation and hope. But look at me. I grew up in wealth without a care in the world. I am so grateful that God was able to reach down through my arrogance, pride and self reliance to take my hand and lead me home. I was a prisoner long before that other man was, I am just so glad that Jesus cared enough to die for me and set me free." All of us are objects of grace. Paul wrote;

Php 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Most people respond to the uncontrollable, unexplainable, unchangeable situations of life with one of two responses and both of them are fatal mistakes.

Some of us when faced with an uncontrollable situation, just try harder. We become more intense, more controlling. The more our life gets out of control, the more controlling and compulsive we become. Because of this we make everybody around us miserable. The more controlling and compulsive we become, the more unhappy we are.

Others are the exact opposite. You just give up and stop trying. You give in to despair and say, "I am a victim, and I will be a victim the rest of my life!" You give in to despair and throw a big pity party. Both of these responses are foolish mistakes that don't work. Instead, you need to take the third step in the path to peace. The third important decision.

3. God's Power—surrender to His loving control

The real reason you are in turmoil, the reason you have so much anxiety and tension is because you are fighting a war with God in your mind. You think you know better than He does what you need. Every day we wake up we have a decision to make: who is going to be in charge of my life? Me or God? Am I going to be in control or is God going to be in control? Because you think you know better, there are verses in the Bible you just want to ignore. You want to make up your own rules. You want to play your own games. The more you take control yourself, the more miserable you become and the more out of control your life becomes. Why? You are at war with the real God when you try to play God. The Bible is very clear about the results of these decisions.

Rom 8:6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace

Those are the alternatives – conflict and death or life and peace. Who is going to be in charge? I don't know if you've thought this through but it's obvious. In a war with God you will always lose.

There's no way you're going to win that war when you're arguing with God. As the old saying says, "Your arms are too short to box with God."

Anyone here remember Mohammed Ali? He was the greatest heavyweight boxer of his day. He used to go around saying, "I am the greatest! I am the greatest!" In 1996 he was invited to participate in the opening ceremony of the Olympic games in Atlanta by lighting the torch. He stood on that stage looking frail. He could barely climb the stairs and his hands and body were shaking from Parkinson's disease. With great difficulty he was able to light the flame. Later in an interview he said, "God gave me that so I could remember that I'm not the greatest, but He is." That's pretty good advice, pretty good attitude.

Sometimes God places a limitation in our life in order to force us to our knees, to force us to depend on Him, to prove that He is trustworthy. Sometimes God just flat out has to incapacitate us to show who's in control. If you fight with God, you're going to lose. And He loves you too much to let you win. If you want to have deep, personal, satisfying peace of mind in heart and soul, you've got to surrender control of your life totally to God.

Years ago Chris Tomlin wrote a song called White Flag. It said;

The battle rages on as storms and tempests roar
We cannot win this fight inside our rebel hearts
We're laying down our weapons now
We raise our white flag we surrender all to You, all for you
We raise our white flag: the war is over, love has come, your love has won

How do you know if you've done that? How do you know if you are living a surrendered life? The evidence of a surrendered life is always obedience. When God tells you to do something you do it. You do not question, you do not delay, you do not debate. You do it. That is what surrender looks like. That is what true peace looks like. What happens when we surrender?

Psa 119:165 Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.

Today, you may be in an uncontrollable circumstance. You may be married to an unchangeable person or facing an unchangeable problem. You may be experiencing an unexplainable situation, and you may be facing an unbeatable foe. How will you respond?

Rom 5:1-2 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. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

We stand in a position of grace. That brings us true peace. Are you tired of being at war with God? The most stressful thing a person can say when they get up in the morning is "I am going to be God of my own life today." The results of that are always worry, guilt, bitterness, resentment, anxiety, fear, fatigue, depression and despair. Instead, why not wake up and say OK God, I surrender. I am going to trust in you today. What is the result? It is peace, power, strength, wisdom, purpose, meaning, eternal life, significance, joy.

Are you angry with God this morning? Angry about a marriage that did not work out, or about a sickness or handicap? Are you angry that you had plans that did not work out or a partner that died too early? Is there resentment in your heart? Is there an area of your life where you think that you know better than God what it is that you need?

Next week we will be talking about El Shaddai – God almighty. Today I want to end with this, and let me say this as clearly as I know how to say this: There is not a single bad thing that has ever happened in your life that God could not have prevented. The almighty God of creation could have prevented it from happening, but He did not.

Why didn't he stop it? I do not know. I do not have that information. I do know this. We live in a fallen world where we free to make bad choices and so are others. As a result, people get hurt. I do know that God has a greater purpose for your life than the problems you are going through. I do know that God is more interested in your character than He is in your comfort.

God wants to use us to show the world what His grace can do in an ordinary life. I also know that this life is not all that there is. We have an eternity in heaven that is waiting for us. One day all the tears will be gone, all the wrongs will be righted, there shall be peace. Until then, God has a plan for us.

There is only one way to peace, and that is through acceptance, trust and surrender.

One writer defined peace like this, Peace is "a conception distinctly peculiar to Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatever sort that is" (Thayer).

Columnist Deborah Mathis wrote about the time when she was at Union Station in Washington D.C. on a particularly busy day. The first thing she remembers about that experience was the noisy hubbub of sounds. The public address announcer calling out arrivals and departures. Scores of pagers, walkie-talkies, and cell phones cried out for someone's attention. You could hear horns honking, machines clinking out change, and babies crying. A security guard yelled at a man who was about to enter a forbidden area. Three women stood up from their bench in order to argue with each other more loudly. And a man in front of her was nervously pacing in a tight circle.

But then she heard someone singing: "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear; What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer." Slowly a change came over the noisy crowd. The voice continued: "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

The quarreling women stopped their talking and quietly took their seats. People who'd been tense and hurried; seemed to slow and relax - and they strained to hear the voice singing the remaining verses of that old hymn. And Ms. Mathis realized she was singing along. So were the three women who had been bickering. And a few others as well. The man in front of her, who had been behaving nervously quietly said: "Nice, huh? I don't even believe in Jesus, but that's nice."

Whatever is happening this morning, you have a friend in Jesus.