



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Advent 3

December 12, 2021

Peace That Passes Understanding **Philippians 4:4–7**

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

It must have been quite an experience to be in the Temple in Old Testament times. Sparkling gold, finely polished wood, rich tapestries, exquisite engravings, and flawlessly hewn stone adorned this massive structure.

And, just as memorable as the building, perhaps even more so, must have been the sacrifices offered there. Twice a day you could smell the incense and the aroma of roasted lamb wafting up into heaven from the morning and evening sacrifices. What vivid reminders God gave to show that real forgiveness was being given for the sins of the people.

Those sacrifices didn't forgive sins in and of themselves, of course; they did so only because they pointed to *the* sacrifice that Jesus would one day make on Calvary.

Still, God's old-covenant people could live in hope – a hope that looked forward to the day when Messiah would come to fulfill all the sacrifices they saw, smelled, and experienced in the Temple.

But, we of the new covenant also live in hope, do we not? We live in hope, knowing that the same Savior who once came to take away sins, will come again and take us to Himself in heaven. Jesus has already fulfilled the ancient hope, for He came and atoned for the sins of the world. But, soon He will come again to bring all believers – those of the old covenant and those of the new – into His eternal kingdom.

Beloved, Jesus wants us to live in eager expectation for the moment of His return. His desire is that we believe and trust that He is indeed coming, and that this hope would bring us the peace and joy we need to live out our faith in this world until He brings us into His heavenly kingdom. Today's epistle is intended to encourage us as we live expectantly for our Lord's return.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice," Paul writes. "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone." Why? Because "The Lord is at hand." Now, that word "reasonableness" doesn't give us the richness of what Paul was saying here. When we think of reasonableness, we think of not going to extremes or of taking the middle road. But that's not what Paul means.



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To fully unpack this in English, we have to use words like gentleness, consideration, kindness, and patience. Psalm 103 describes it this way: “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust” (v. 13-14).

That’s the kind of love we’re to show toward others, the *reasonableness* with which we’re to deal with friend and foe alike, especially to the weak and helpless. We’re to be kind, generous, and thoughtful, not selfish, rough, or pushy.

But it’s one thing to *know* that we should live this way toward others, it’s quite another thing to do it. The Law says, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). But here’s the problem: the Law can’t *make* you love your neighbor, it can only threaten to punish you for not doing it.

Where then can such a spirit of gentleness and consideration come from? The Apostle Paul answers the question right here in our text when he writes, “The Lord is at hand.” Jesus is at hand! Jesus is near. Jesus is coming . . . soon! Not only has He given His life for you to take away your sins and make you holy in the eyes of God, but soon He will come to bring you into His eternal presence.

If that’s not something to look forward to and hope for, I don’t know what is! Our sinful nature may fear death, but the new self brought to life through faith in Christ looks forward to being in God’s presence. This hope of heaven gives us a peace – *the* peace – that passes all understanding, and it spills over from being a peace with respect to God, to granting us peace with respect to the world.

Dealing with the world can make us anxious. The peace of Christ and hope of heaven overcomes anxiety. To be anxious is to be worried about something. It stems from uncertainty, not knowing how things will turn out. Will I have success, or will I fail? Will I live or will I die? Will I be praised, or will I be disgraced? Will I be rich, or will I be poor?

That’s how we live in the world when our sinful nature runs the show. When anxiety predominates, we scratch and grab and fight to have our own way. We try to pile up wealth, power, and security, because . . . who knows what will happen? And, while we’re selfishly struggling to get our way, we fume at others for doing the same thing. That’s what worry does. And it’s why the apostle consoles us: “Do not be anxious about anything.”

But of course we are. We look to the future, and the unknown frightens us. But Paul still says, “Do not be anxious about anything.” Don’t worry about anything. God is not dead; Jesus lives! He rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of the Father. Everything is under control – *His* control – everything!

Brother or sister, does your life seem like a war zone? Your Father in heaven makes the forge, the iron, and the fire, and He promises, “No weapon forged against you will succeed. . . . This is the heritage of the Lord’s servants, and their vindication comes from me” (Isaiah 54:17). Whatever threatens you, the Lord is your mighty fortress, a shield which cannot fail you. What do you have to fear?

The Lord is coming, beloved! And He’s the same Lord who reigns victoriously in glory, with all power and might. But, in the meantime, He’s not hiding up there in heaven,



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unapproachably concealed above the clouds. He's accessible to us even now, so that we may share our inmost thoughts and concerns with Him through the medium known as prayer. In times of affliction, we're like soldiers in battle. Exposed to danger, they call out for help, and fire comes from heaven to obliterate the enemy. Prayer is often like that: calling to God for help, and our Lord wipes out our enemies according to His will.

Are there limits to the things we can ask for help with? No. "In everything," writes the apostle, "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Very often, the problem we have with prayer isn't that God doesn't answer; it's that we don't pray. The disciples, too, had this problem. One day they struggled to cast out a demon and couldn't. Jesus had to explain to them they had forgotten to pray. Christians are to be in constant communication with God. And, the thing is, you'll never find a time when He's not on the other end; you never get sent to voicemail! Your prayers don't have to be formal; they just need to happen. We need to direct our thoughts, needs, wants, and desires to heaven and tell our Savior about them. He's promised not only to listen, but also to answer in the way He knows is best.

Dear Christian, is something bothering you? Are you in need? Is something weighing heavily on your heart? Or are you thankful for something? Has the Lord done something for you for which you're grateful? Tell Him! Talk to Him, confide in Him; He understands. And don't worry; if something isn't good for you, He won't give it to you. But neither will He deny you anything that will be of eternal blessing to you. Just pray and don't be anxious. He's got this. And He's got you.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Where does this peace of God come from? It comes from being in Christ Jesus. Only in Christ are we given the assurance of peace.

By faith in Jesus, we have peace, but not only that. By faith in Jesus we have all the benefits of His perfect and holy life. He's the reason we are heirs of eternal life. His atoning work for us is why we can be confident that heaven is our home. Be at peace, beloved. God is on your side because of your faith in Jesus.

This peace we have is beyond the understanding of the world. But, truth be told: we don't understand this peace anymore than the world does. It's too deep, too strong, too mysterious even for our own comprehension. It's truly a divine peace, for it's the peace of Christ, given us by His Holy Spirit.

But, in this peace – understood or not – we can face death unafraid, because we know what's on the other side. The world can't comprehend how anyone can willingly die for his faith, or go without sexual pleasure, or keep his hand from taking money lying loose. But these things become possible to those who walk by faith and in the peace of Christ.

Now, notice that this peace will "keep your hearts and minds." Jesus said, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, [and] slander" (Mat. 15:19). All such evil lurks within our hearts and minds – that is, in our sinful flesh. Thank God He guards our hearts with His peace – His grace, His forgiveness – for



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if He didn't, our sinful cravings would break out like a nest of hatchling spiders. If He didn't guard our minds, our sinful inclinations would twist and bend us like docks in a hurricane.

Oh, how we need God's peace! How we need Christ and His righteousness! How we need God's Word of absolution breaking into our guilt-laden souls! We need the Word of God preached into our ears. We need the washing of our souls with the water and the Word of Holy Baptism. We need the Meal of Immortality fed into our spirits. The Means of Grace are the antidote, beloved, for the turmoil, tempest, and trouble of this world. They're the shelter in which God fosters His incomprehensible peace – the peace that makes our hearts kind and gentle, the peace that overcomes anxiety, the peace that protects us from our fleshly thirst and devilish desires. Our hearts and minds are kept "through Christ Jesus" whom we receive as He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments. Receive His peace, beloved. Live at peace. In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen