

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle-ness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanks-giving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Throughout time, there have been many Thanksgiving Days that came at, what seemed like, the "wrong time." This holiday has come when people were suffering as a result of war or terrorism, when people were suffering as a result of financial disasters or as a result of congregational turmoil or family difficulties or illness or death.

I suppose that every Thanksgiving Day finds someone in the midst of sorrow and suffering. Does this mean that such a person has no reason to give thanks? Do we give thanks only when EVERYTHING is going well?

Perhaps, for the unbeliever this is the way it is. The unbeliever can always find a reason to complain, to cry bitter tears, to point a finger of blame at someone else, even at God.

However, what about the Christian? What about you and me? You are a rare person indeed, if you cannot find some pain, some sorrow, some loss . . . something that disturbs your happiness, some reason to say, "If only this were not happening in my life, I could give thanks with a joyful heart."

Today, with the help of God, we will see that every day is a cause for giving thanks with a joyful heart. Come with me, then, as we journey into the mind and heart of the almighty and merciful God. There we shall find

A PEACEFUL THANKSGIVING.

Raise your hand if you are against peace. <> I would suppose that everyone here, in fact, everyone in the world is in favor of peace . . . at least peace in ones own life.

But, what is this thing called "peace"? One dictionary gives these definitions:

1. freedom from war; a cessation or absence of hostilities between nations.
2. a state of harmony between people or groups; freedom from dissension.
3. freedom from civil commotion; public order and security.

4. freedom from anxiety, annoyance, or other mental disturbance: peace of mind.
5. a state of tranquillity or serenity.
6. silence; stillness.

Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary

If I were to sum up these definitions, I would say that peace is a state or condition in which all is well. In fact, the Hebrew word for peace, "shalom," has the root meaning of "wholeness," "completeness." All is well: no conflict, no disturbance, no worries, no fighting, no pain, no sorrow ... nothing that a person would describe as bad or undesirable.

On this basis, it would seem that peace is something that can never be achieved on earth. If it is achieved, it is only temporary. Sooner or later, something will happen that will interfere with that peace. It may happen in the arena of personal relationships or finances or employment or health or national and international strife. From almost any direction come problems that bring an end to one's peace.

Have you ever experienced a time of peace, when everything in your life was just the way you wanted it to be . . . when you might say that your life was complete, nothing lacking, that it was just right? Then, you could relaxed. All tension was gone, every muscle at ease, every thought joyful, every sense satisfied. It was as if you were resting in the cool, soft grass with a gentle breeze drifting over you, the lovely sounds of songbirds filling your ears, the delicate scent of flowers delighting your sense of smell. Then you could genuinely say, "Thank You, Lord."

This morning, God wants you to know that you can indeed have such times . . . times when ". . . *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*" (Phil. 4:7) But, how can you have something which surpasses all understanding? Even we Christians have trouble wrapping our brains around the height, the depth, the breadth of this peace. We can only rest in wonder over what our God has done in His surpassing love.

Adam and Eve knew what peace was like, until they lost it. What they had was intended for everyone who would come after them. But, in a moment of unimaginable stupidity, they threw it all away.

God's voice! Run for fear; hide for shame. There was an inner turmoil, which they had never known and their only thought was to hide and try to shift the

blame. However, this brought no peace. For them there was only shame, pain, and death: eternal separation from the one and only source of all that is good.

Throughout the centuries that followed, their descendants fought with the same inner turmoil, desperately trying to find a way to make all things well. But, their understanding led them away from this peace, for they sought peace through their own efforts. *"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"* (Mic.6:6f) What does God want anyway? Sacrifices, good works, self-punishment, money, pilgrimages: such was their way of thinking.

The peace of God surpasses all understanding. No sinner can figure out how to attain it. It is beyond the grasp of natural man, but it is not beyond God.

"His own Son was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom4:25f) Not what I have done, not what I can do, for I have done nothing but sin and can do nothing that is not sinful. He did it; He did it all. Jesus Christ pacified God by paying for our sins. Jesus made us completely acceptable to God by clothing us in His own righteousness.

It is complete. No conflict with God remains. No anger, no thought of divine retribution. There is nothing to fear from the almighty and righteous God. He is propitiated, satisfied. Justice has been met. It is finished. All is complete, everything necessary to put us in harmony with God. Our peace with God has been achieved. All is well.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Peace: what a wonderful concept. But I have concerns in my life. Things are not going well. I am worried about tomorrow: about my health tomorrow, about my family tomorrow, about my finances tomorrow, about job tomorrow,

about my . . . Well, you fill in the blank.

Yes, difficulties come into our lives because of the reality of sin in the world. Part of our problem with these difficulties . . . perhaps a large part of the stress that we experience is to be found in the fact that we think WE have to solve the problems. Oh yes, we work at them, but when the day is done, we here our God of peace saying, "Don't worry about anything, but with prayer that prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to Me; and My peace will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

This God sacrificed His own Son so we could be at peace with Him. Do you think that, after He has performed such a monumental act of love, He is going to abandon you to the whims of Satan. *"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"* (Rom.8:32) All things: whatever is needed in your life, He will give, for He is at peace with you. He who controls all things has nothing against you, no reason to let bad things happen to you. Therefore, whatever difficulties you face this Thanksgiving Day, these are instruments in the hands of God which He will use for your good. You can trust Him to take care of everything. *"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care [all your worries] upon Him, for He cares for you."* (1 Pet.5:6,7)

You see, the ultimate reason for you to give thanks to God on this day is because you are at peace with God . . . with the all-powerful, all-knowing, always present God of love. Stuff is happening in our lives, but not because God doesn't know it, not because He can't do anything about it, but because He, in His own wisdom and love, is allowing it, until it has worked His purpose.

All we need to know is that this God is at peace with us. The temporary setbacks of this life are nothing, if we know that all is well between us and God. We know that this life will not last long. The day will come when all our troubles and sorrows will be left behind as He wisks us away from this world and gently sets us down in the land of eternal peace.

I can give you no greater reason to give thanks on this Thanksgiving Day. Are you in poor health? God is at peace with you. Are you having financial problems? God is at peace with you. Have you suffered a loss? God is at peace with you. Are you depressed? God is at peace with you. Are you concerned about the direction your country is going? God is at peace with you.

There is nothing . . . NOTHING to interfere with your thankfulness this day, for if all is well with God, then ALL IS well. Thanks be to God.

Now, rest at peace in the cool, soft pastures of His love, with the gentle breeze of the Holy Spirit drifting over you, the lovely melody of the Gospel of peace in your ears, the delicate fragrance of God's grace filling your heart and mind.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 15:13)