

Powerful Prayers

“God Give Me Peace”

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This morning we continue our series of messages on powerful prayers. Last week we talked about the prayer “God, I can’t take it anymore.” We saw that God is faithful to walk with us through our troubles and our suffering even though he may not take them away. Next week we will look at the prayer “God, bring good out of this bad situation.” Today we look at the prayer, “God, give me peace.”

These are all prayers that God has promised to say “Yes” to. Let’s look at Jesus’ promise of peace.

John 14:26-27

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. ²⁷Peace 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.

Do you have inner peace this morning? When we are not at peace with ourselves, then it’s impossible to enjoy life. We can have health, good looks, money, an amazing job and a wonderful family, but when every day of our lives is filled with anxiety we never enjoy any of it. On the other hand, if we are at peace, then we can handle almost anything that life throws our way.

Anxiety comes from many directions in our lives. The pace at which we live creates anxiety. We are always in a hurry and always behind. We find ourselves impatient, if not raging, when we are stuck behind a slow moving car. We are overwhelmed with communications: phone calls, text messages, emails, Twitter and Facebook. We get stressed out trying to stay connected with everyone. It is almost impossible to get a minute of peace and quiet.

So what do we do? We take medications to get rid of the heartburn. We drink alcohol, go for massages, practice aromatherapy and go to Yoga classes. We do all this to because we desperately need relief from the stress and strain of living in a pressure-packed world.

Yet despite all our efforts we only numb the pain for a little while, and the anxiety returns amplified exponentially. So we have to increase our self-medication to cope. Why is

peace so illusive? Because we look for it in all the wrong places. We think peace is a state of mind induced by drugs or self-discipline. Or we believe we can achieve peace if we can just control the circumstances in our lives. If we can eliminate all the exterior stressors in our lives then we can find peace. All our self-efforts to create or find peace are futile.

To find peace we have to go to the right place. Without God there is no peace. Real peace is a gift from God. In fact, true peace does not exist apart from God. Jesus promised to give his disciples peace. "My peace I leave with you... My peace I give to you." They would face tremendous external stressors: they would be fed to lions and burned alive. Yet these men and women faced brutal persecution and even death with an inner peace that the world had never seen. A peace the world could not give and no matter how hard it tried, a peace the world could not take away.

Peace, peace—there is no peace without God. God and peace are inseparable. You can master every relaxation technique and meditate until you're blue in the face, but if the peace you experience is disconnected from God's presence, then it's only a temporary fix.

Peace comes when we admit that we cannot achieve peace on our own. Peace comes when we go to God and ask for peace. How do we experience God's peace? It depends on the source of the anxiety in our lives.

Sometimes the source of anxiety in our lives is because we are willfully, consistently living in disobedience to God's will. If you are embezzling money your life will be filled with stress. If you are having an affair and being unfaithful to your marriage vows, your life will be full of stress. If you are an habitual liar, your life will be full of stress. If you are secretly indulging in pornography, your life will be full of stress. You can pray and ask God for peace, but he is not going to grant you peace. He is not interested in helping you live in denial. His peace is not some magic potion to make you feel good. God's peace is lasting and deep. In order to receive his peace, God will have to bring transformation to your life first. He will not give you peace as long as you are blatantly living in sin. Peace comes from being connected

with God. As long as we are disobedient to God we are disconnected from him. We are going our own way, and he cannot give us peace. If you are rebelling against God, then you are rejecting peace. Why? Because God is peace.

The process of receiving peace may need to begin with confession. "God, I've got this sin in my life. I need your forgiveness and I need your help to overcome it." Peace will not come until the pattern of disobedience is broken in our lives, and we reconnect with God. The path to peace is not always peaceful. We invite God to come into our lives and remove those things that have become a barrier between him and us. Allowing God to transform us can be a painful experience. We have to let go of some of the things that we think we want or need in our lives. If the source of your anxiety is persistent sinful behavior, then you have to let God forgive you and transform you before you can experience his peace.

Disobedience to God is not the only source of anxiety in our lives. Anxiety can come from dealing with serious or terminal illness. It can result from conflicts with family or friends or coworkers. Anxiety can be caused by exhaustion, lack of exercise or bad eating habits. It can also be the result of focusing on negative thoughts.

Whatever the source of your anxiety, God promises to give you peace. He will guide you to peace when you ask him to help you identify the sources of your anxiety and then ask him to help you deal with those sources. Before peace comes, God may enable you to seek reconciliation with a family member. The family member may not respond, but peace will come if you are obedient to do your part. Before peace comes, God may ask you to forgive someone. Before peace comes, God may ask you to take care of your body by eating right, getting enough rest and exercise. Before peace comes, God may lead you to change jobs and be content with less money, but fewer demands.

I cannot tell you for sure what path of peace God has for you. God is the source of peace, and he is eager to give you peace if you will allow him to deal with the source of

anxiety in your life. So often we want God just to make us feel better, but we are not willing to change. In order to experience peace, we need to let God be God in our lives. If we refuse him the place of God in our lives, we will never experience peace.

Peter provides us with a good example of how to experience God's peace.

Matthew 14:23-33

After Jesus had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

³²And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

We can relate to Peter and the disciples. All of us are being tossed about on the stormy sea of life. We face suffering and anxiety.

The disciples were in the midst of a storm that night. They were struggling. They look up and see Jesus effortlessly walking on the water. The storm is not slowing him down. At first they think it is a ghost and cry out in fear. Now they are more afraid of the ghost than of the storm! Jesus speaks to them and tells them not to be afraid.

Peter says: "If it is you, tell me to come to you on the water." Peter asks to connect with Jesus in the midst of the storm. He makes the right decision. He knows that peace comes when he is with the Lord. Jesus says, "Come on." I've often wondered how quickly or slowly Peter got out of the boat. Did he jump out? Or did he cautiously place one foot over the edge of the boat and test the water? Then he put the other foot over and held on with one hand till the last possible moment before he let go and stood on the water. How many

times does Jesus invite us to follow him and we do--slowly, cautiously, checking out everything and holding on to the boat just in case? Peter knows that peace is with the Lord, so he lets go and starts walking to Jesus. Then something happened. Peter took his eyes off Jesus and started looking at the wind and the waves. As soon as he did, he began to sink. Notice that when Peter was walking on the water, the wind and the waves were still there. Jesus did not take away the storm. But he gave Peter power to come to him and find peace in the midst of the storm.

I relate to Peter. I know that peace comes only with Jesus. I start toward him, and then I take my eyes off him. I start looking at the problems and storms in my life. They are still there. He did not remove them. I start trying to deal with them in my own strength. When I take my eyes off Jesus, I disconnect from him and peace is gone. I begin to sink under the weight of my problems. Anxiety floods my soul.

Then Peter cries out the prayer that can restore peace: "Lord, save me!" Jesus reaches down and pulls him up, puts him back in the boat and then the wind dies down. We are going to mess up. We are going to take our eyes off Jesus. We are going to quit praying and trusting. When we do, the anxiety will return, and we will feel like we are drowning. Like Peter, we need to cry out to the source of peace to save us. And he will connect with us again. A key message of the story is that peace comes when we keep our eyes on Jesus and stay connected with him.

God is willing and eager to give you peace that passes all understanding. Bring your anxiety to him. Ask him to reveal the source and guide you in the path to peace as you keep your eyes on him. Where in your life do you need to experience God's peace today?