

# How to have Peace in a time of Crisis

I wonder how each of you here this morning has coped with the events of the past year. It truly has been a very challenging time and although each of us will have been affected differently, in one way or another, Covid 19 has had an impact on everyone in this country and across many other parts of the world.

I'm sure that at times all of us have been affected by worry, stress and anxiety caused in some way by this situation. Worry, stress and anxiety rob us of the peace that God wants us to have in Him. And this makes them attractive tools for Satan to use against us because he doesn't want us to know God's peace. He wants to bring us down and make us ineffective as believers.

Think about it. If you are saved, if you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ - that he died for your sins and was raised to life victorious over sin. If you have trusted him for salvation, then Satan can't take that from you. But he will do whatever he can to keep Christians from shining their light in the dark world around them and being an effective witness to the lost.

That's why we need to be reminded constantly that God is the one in control both of this world and of our individual circumstances. When we set our minds on Him, we look away from the things in the world that cause others all around us to be in fear.

We find a good example of this in Isaiah chapter 8.

## **Isaiah 8 v 11-14a (NLT)**

"The LORD has given me a strong warning not to think like everyone else does. He said, 'Don't call everything a conspiracy, like they do, and don't live in dread of what frightens them. Make the LORD of Heaven's Armies holy in your life. He is the one you should fear. He is the one who should make you tremble. He will keep you safe.'"

God was speaking to Isaiah at a time where the people of Judah and the King of Judah (who was Ahaz at the time) were in fear of a conspiracy.

A conspiracy means: an evil, unlawful, treacherous, or surreptitious plan formulated in secret by two or more persons.

If we turn back to Isaiah chapter 7 we'll see what this conspiracy was that the people feared.

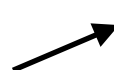
## Isaiah 7 v 1-2 (NLT)

1 When Ahaz, son of Jotham and grandson of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, set out to attack Jerusalem. However, they were unable to carry out their plan.

2 The news had come to the royal court of Judah: "Syria is allied with Israel against us!" So the hearts of the king and his people trembled with fear, like trees shaking in a storm.

So the people of Judah were hearing news of a plot between the kings of Israel and Syria to come and attack Jerusalem. Remember at this time the nation of Israel was divided into the northern and southern kingdoms and the northern kingdom was still referred to as Israel, the southern kingdom as Judah.

## Isaiah 7 v3-9 (NLT)



A remnant shall Return

3 Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Take your son Shear-jashub and go out to meet King Ahaz. You will find him at the end of the aqueduct that feeds water into the upper pool, near the road leading to the field where cloth is washed.

4 **Tell him to stop worrying. Tell him he doesn't need to fear** the fierce anger of those two burned-out embers, King Rezin of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah.

5 Yes, the kings of Syria and Israel are plotting against him, saying,

6 'We will attack Judah and capture it for ourselves. Then we will install the son of Tabeel as Judah's king.'

7 **But this is what the Sovereign LORD says:**

**"This invasion will never happen;  
it will never take place;**

8 for Syria is no stronger than its capital, Damascus,  
and Damascus is no stronger than its king, **Rezin**.

As for Israel, within sixty-five years  
it will be crushed and completely destroyed.

9 Israel is no stronger than its capital, Samaria,  
and Samaria is no stronger than its king, **Pekah son of Remaliah**.

Unless your faith is firm,  
I cannot make you stand firm."

A couple of weeks ago, Andy spoke about the "Heavenly View." The idea that God's perspective on things is completely different to man's.

God says don't worry what these 2 men (Rezin & Pekah) say they are going to do, for they are just men after all. But I am almighty God. Trust me!

God, through the prophet Isaiah was trying to show king Ahaz the view from his perspective but he says at the end: "unless your faith is firm, I cannot make you stand firm."

God doesn't force anyone to trust him or to obey him. He gives us all a choice. King Ahaz and the majority of the nation of Judah at that time chose not to believe these words spoken through Isaiah and so they were in great fear of this alliance between Israel and Syria.

In the process of time God used the king of Assyria to defeat Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel. I'm not going to talk about the details of that today..

The point is that when faced with these threats and rumours of a coming attack, the King and the people were struck with great fear and they didn't trust God even though he reached out to them with a promise that these things would not take place.

And indeed the thing they feared did not take place - so they were worried about something that never happened.

Quote from Warren Weirsbe: "Dr. Walter Cavert reported a survey on worry that indicated only 8% of the things people worried about were legitimate matters of concern! The other 92% were either imaginary, never happened, or involved matters over which the people had no control anyway."

Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44) and he wants our minds to be occupied with things that are actually not even a real concern to us. But as long as he keeps us distracted with those thoughts, we are not experiencing the Peace of God.

That's why in chapter 8 v11 God, speaking directly to Isaiah, reminded him not to think like everyone else was thinking about this conspiracy between the Kings of Israel and Syria.

This has been a running theme throughout history as recorded in God's word and is very relevant to us today too.

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.  
Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Those who trust God and live a life of faith in him have always been at odds with the views of the world. We mustn't be discouraged if we constantly feel like we are different and we mustn't be tempted to believe something just because it is the popular view among people, particularly the view of non believers.

But it's very easy to do. Our human nature has a strong desire to fit in. It's not easy to be different. So we need to encourage each other as a church to stand firm in our faith.

I had to wonder about the people of Judah in Isaiah's day, how they even got to hear about the things they feared. Isaiah received this prophecy over 2500 years ago. It must have been just by word of mouth, but the reports they heard were enough to make them live in great fear and anxiety.

### **Fast forward to today and we have an even bigger problem.**

We have so much information at our fingertips, in our pockets, on our TVs and on our social media feeds. Today we can barely escape from a constant barrage of news and information from all over the world. And many of us will open up our phones and begin consuming all this information as soon as we wake up.

By the time we make it to the breakfast table our minds are already spinning with

- the latest numbers of Covid cases and deaths
- the latest comments from politicians suggesting the lockdown will go on longer than we were lead to believe yesterday.
- The impending economic crisis
- People talking about the even greater threat of climate change once Covid is over.

...and so on..

Maybe not everyone here does check the news as soon as you wake up, but for a while I was doing this and it will be true of many people, so it's good to be aware of what people fill their minds with.

About a year ago I read a book called: "Stop Reading the News" by Rolf Dobelli

He's an ex journalist who began to see over his career just how damaging a constant consumption of news is for people. He observes that the quality of news reporting over the years has gone downhill dramatically because it is no longer about real investigative journalism designed to uncover the truth about things. What matters today is simply selling the news in whatever format it comes.

Whether it's selling papers, getting more viewers on network television, or more clicks on stories on websites, the mainstream news media is huge business worth millions or billions of dollars. Journalists today are required to write multiple short news pieces every day and the quality of reporting is much less important than the quantity. The aim is to get people to click on the headlines because within the stories will be many adverts and these are how the news agencies make their money.

The author of the book goes on to explain how the media exploits certain traits about us to get us to consume more stories. For example, negative news is said to have twice the impact on us as good news. This is why a typical news bulletin is dominated by negative stories, perhaps with something light hearted to finish. And that also says something - the familiar package in which news is delivered day by day.

Most newspapers have the exact same number of pages every day and the 6 o'clock news is always the same length of time no matter what actually happened that day. There could be numerous very significant events that occur one day and only a fraction will be reported on. Another day almost nothing really important happens and they still have to fill the time with content.

And in order to keep people's attention, much of that content will be tailored to appeal to our apparent thirst for sensational, alarmist and negative stories.

Quote:

- "News is to the mind what sugar is to the body: appetising, easily digestible and extremely damaging."

And this problem is made even worse by the fact that we don't really know what is true and what is false in what we are reading. We can have a pretty good gut feeling about certain things. But other things if we are really honest, we just can't know if what a journalist is claiming is really the truth. We don't trust the media because they get things wrong all the time and because the barrage of news just keeps on coming, very rarely does it ever get pointed out that mistakes in reporting took place.

### **It is also highly addictive**

Quote:

- "In the past 20 years, since the advent of the internet and the smartphone, our addiction to the news has become a dangerous mania."

It quickly becomes habit to check news sites throughout the day especially in times like these as if we are hoping to get answers about when all this might be over and we are instead disappointed by more bad news. And all these distractions stop us focussing on things we should be doing instead.

Final quote:

- “Information these days is no longer a scarce resource - attention, on the other hand, is in short supply. So why are we so irresponsible with it?”
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The reason I’ve explained all these points about the news media is that I’ve had the personal experience that consuming too much news and focussing on it rather than God causes me to be anxious about things that are completely out of my control.

God, on the other hand, wants us to have peace and know he’s in control.

So how can we turn our experience from anxiety and worry into one of peace.

First we need to take our focus away from that which causes fear and anxiety such as the things I’ve just described.

Second, we need to turn our focus to the Lord and what his word says.

We’ll look at some verses from the book of **Philippians**.

I want to draw out a few verses from this letter that will help us put our focus on the right things. But first let’s remember that Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians from prison. Most agree it was during his imprisonment in Rome.

Most of us would consider Paul’s situation a time of crisis. From a human perspective, he had every reason to feel worry, stress and anxiety. But just as God told Isaiah to think differently than the people all around him, Paul is an example to us of the attitude we should have as Christians, whatever the circumstances around us.

We’ll just look at a few verses going through the epistle and highlight certain things Paul says.

### **Philippians 1:9-10**

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in **knowledge** and all **discernment**, that **you may approve the things that are excellent**, that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ,”

I said earlier with regard to news reports that it is often hard to tell what is really true. But there is one source of ultimate truth that we can depend on and which must be the standard against which we test all other claims.

That is of course the Bible which is God’s word. It doesn’t give us answers to specific questions such as whether or not the recent US election was fraudulent or legitimate. But it does contain many truths and promises of God that help us not to worry so much about the specifics and to be discerning

So using the same example of the US election, we read in Romans 13:1

**“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”**

That is a true statement from God’s word that should encourage us that however we felt about the result of that election, God is still in control and he has put the person into power that he wills to be there for this particular time and for his purposes.

We are responsible to vote for political candidates that we believe will most closely uphold Godly morals and laws. But our responsibility stops there. God sees your heart and knows your motive in that situation, but his plan may be different and so we need to trust such things to God and then have peace that he is still in control.

### **Philippians 1:27**

“Only **let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ**, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,”

### **Philippians 2:14-16**

“Do all things **without complaining and disputing**, that you may become blameless and harmless, **children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation**, among whom **you shine as lights** in the world, holding fast the **word of life**, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain.”

How often have I complained in the last year about circumstances? I think if I knew the answer I'd be quite embarrassed. Again it is so natural for us to complain and especially if we allow the voices of the world be the main thing influencing our minds. With all the negative news, we find many reasons to complain.

But when we focus on God's promises to us, we have many reasons to rejoice, to be different, to be lights in the world. How can we be a witness to the lost around us if all we do is complain the same way they do. We don't show them that we have hope in Christ.

### **Philippians 3:18-21**

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—**who set their mind on earthly things**.

For **our citizenship is in heaven**, from which we also **eagerly wait** for the Savior, the Lord **Jesus Christ**, who will **transform our lowly body** that it may be **conformed to His glorious body**, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Remember that the vast majority of people around you have their mind set on earthly things. The concerns of this life. Even as Christians we easily get into this way of thinking.

My wife is from Germany and I am from the UK. She has a German passport and I have a British one. We've found ourselves talking about whether she should try and get British citizenship or if I should get German citizenship because what if things get really complicated for us after Brexit?

But then we realised in God's eyes we are neither British nor German anymore but we are citizens of heaven. We already have our heavenly passports, we're just waiting for our flight out of here! We are not yet in our home country - we are on foreign soil in this world. That means we are to be ambassadors for God in this world until he calls us home. That's what an ambassador does - they live in a country where they are a foreigner to be representatives of the country where their citizenship is.

Keeping this view in mind will take our focus off the things of this world and on to the coming kingdom.

## Philippians 4

V4 “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! (NKJV)

“Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!” (NLT)

From John Walvoord :

“Sometimes the trials and pressures of life make it almost impossible to be happy. But Paul did not tell his readers to be happy. He encouraged them to rejoice in the Lord. In fact, he said it twice in verse 4 (cf. 3:1; 1 Thes. 5:16). Christ is the One in whom the sphere of rejoicing was to take place. Surely there are many circumstances in which Christians cannot be happy. But they can always rejoice in the Lord and delight in Him. Paul himself was an excellent example of one who had inner joy when external circumstances — such as persecution, imprisonment, the threat of death — were against him.”

V5

“Let you **gentleness** be known to all men. **The Lord is at hand.**” (NKJV)

“Let everyone see that you are **considerate** in all you do. Remember, **the Lord is coming soon.**” (NLT)

**Epieikes** = Gentleness, Forbearance, being considerate.

From Vine - “looking humanely and reasonably at the facts of a case.” “Not insisting on the letter of the law.”

Again we are to be different in the world - lights in the darkness. Here Paul says we are to be gentle in our conduct. When we are anxious and stressed, we are often irritable and impatient with people. But we need to be considerate of others and our witness to them especially since “the Lord is at hand.” Jesus could come for the church at any moment and when he does, we will no longer be here to offer hope and salvation to the lost.

V6-7

“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 guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (NKJV)

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” (NLT)

V6 starts with a command to be anxious for nothing. That’s what everything I’ve been saying this morning has been building up to. This is such a famous and often quoted verse and sometimes we are so used to hearing it we don’t really know how to apply it.

- **anxious** (μεριμνάω **merimnaō**; from 3308; to be anxious about: — (be, have) care(-ful), take thought.
- Vine: Signifies “to be anxious about, to have a distracting care.”

Warren Wiersbe: “the Greek word translated “anxious” (careful) in Philippians 4:6 means “to be pulled in different directions.” Our hopes pull us in one direction; our fears pull us in the opposite direction; and we are pulled apart!”

So first of all to avoid being anxious we need to make our hope in Christ the number one focus in our lives. If we find ourselves beginning to worry about things we should take them immediately to the Lord in prayer.

V6 also tells us how to pray.

Wiersby suggests: the word **Prayer** is the general word for making requests known to the Lord. It carries with it the idea of adoration, devotion and worship.

We need to first recognise who God is, that he is all powerful and all knowing, fully able to take care of the things we are worried about and praise him for that.

**Supplication** is “an earnest sharing of our needs and problems.” It shouldn’t be a casual listing of things we want God to do for us. But God wants us to share with him the things that really weigh us down. (As Jesus did in gethsemane for example when he sweat drops of blood.)

**With Thanksgiving** - This is the thing we often forget to do. We should always come to God with a thankful attitude for the things he has already done for us. Try to think of the positive things in your situation rather than focus on the negatives and thank God for them. This will change the way we think about our circumstances and make us feel less anxious.

Verse 7 says:

V7 - “and the **peace of God**, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

When we come to God in rightful prayer instead of being anxious, He will give us his peace which surpasses all understanding.

God promises to give us peace when we trust in him. It is a peace that doesn’t even make sense to us. We don’t understand how we can feel at peace with everything going on in our lives at times, but we can experience it none the less. This peace comes only from God.

And look what that peace does:

It **guards** our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The word for **guard** in the greek is “phroureō” and it is a military term, meaning “to keep by guarding, to keep under guard,” as with a garrison

The word is used in scripture:

(a) of blocking up every way of escape, as in a siege

(b) of providing protection against the enemy, as a garrison does

See 2 Cor. 11v32, “guarded” - kept, i.e. kept the city, “with a garrison.” It is used of the security of the Christian until the end, 1 Pet. 1:5 - “are guarded,” **and of the sense of that security that is his when he puts all his matters into the hands of God, Phil 4:7, “shall guard.”**



In these passages the idea is not merely that of protection, but of inward garrisoning as by the Holy Spirit.

If our hearts and minds need to be guarded as with a garrison, it is because they are under threat of attack from Satan. He is the father of lies and wants to get into our minds and keep them focussed on things that make us worry, be anxious and stop trusting God. There is indeed a battle over our minds but if we seek the Lord in prayer he will guard our minds against the enemy and give us peace.

V8-9 “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—**meditate on these things**. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

As I said right at the start, Satan cannot rob anyone of their salvation, but he can rob us of peace by corrupting our minds with worry and anxiety. He can bring us down in our spirits, make us focus on our circumstances and complain about them. He wants us to feel this way so that we don't share our hope with unbelievers, so that we can't lead them into the way of peace that only God can provide us.

So let's be people of God's word - reading it not out of religious obligation but because it encourages and edifies us and the truth in it is our defence against the enemies lies. Let's pay less attention to the news - remember it's making a lot of money making many people anxious and depressed.

Only God can give us peace in a time of crisis.

Amen