

“Let The Peace Of Christ Rule In You”

In 2016 Southern Cross health surveyed 2000 Kiwis around the issue of stress. They found that almost 60% of Kiwis are stressed at least once a week - with financial and work related issues stressing out younger Kiwis, while their older counterparts are more likely to be stressed out about health.

The survey showed:

- For those over 50, the main causes of stress were their own health issues and those of their family.
- The main cause of stress for young families was having enough money to live on.
- Young Kiwis without children were more concerned about job security, workload and having enough money to live on.
- Females were more likely to be stressed over more than half of the working week.

It needs to be said that we all need a level of stress in order to be healthy. From time to time, everyone can feel sad, depressed, anxious, tense or afraid. These are common and natural human emotions. But some of the research out now is a cause for concern. Five years ago, 5 percent of 15 -24 year olds were experiencing psychological distress. Today that figure is around 12 percent.

Another study in 2016 found that 35% of Kiwis say they are not getting enough sleep. That figure rises to 42% for those aged between 35 -49 years of age. When she was interviewed, one mother of four children said “I am so tired, my idea of a holiday is a trip to the dentist. I just can’t wait to sit in that chair and relax.”

So, listen to the word from the Lord for today

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”.
(Colossians 3:15 – 17 NIV)

Let The Peace Of Christ Rule

Paul tells us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. The word that Paul used was used in athletic events in those days. It’s the word that we would use in a game of tennis for the umpire. He is saying that the peace of Christ is like the umpire or the referee of a game. In tennis the line umpire makes the call regarding whether a ball was in or out. The chair umpire is the final authority on all questions relating to the match. Now the player can dispute the umpires decision. They can throw their racket on the ground in disgust. They can even become like some tennis stars and abuse the umpire, throw a tantrum and smash their racquet, but it doesn’t make any difference. The decision of the umpire is final. In rugby, when the referee holds up a red card, it doesn’t matter if the player thinks he right or wrong, fair or unfair, when that red card is held up, if you are the player, you are going to take a walk.

The peace of Christ is like the umpire or the referee in our hearts. When a decision is right, the peace referee gives the right signals and tells us in our hearts that it’s OK. When we are going against what God wants us to do, the peace umpire says “Sorry - no peace. It’s wrong. It’s not what God wants for you”. It doesn’t matter if we rationalise it, or deny it, or tell ourselves we are not hearing the voice of the referee, the peace referee still says – “Sorry – no peace”. So Paul is saying to these Colossian Christians, don’t ignore the referee. Let the peace of Christ rule. Don’t pretend you have peace when you don’t have it. Listen to the referee.

1. What Is The Peace Of Christ?

The peace of Christ is the settled assurance that because of God’s care and Gods competence, this universe is a perfectly safe place for me to be. Even though this universe doesn’t look like a safe place for me to be, I can trust God and live at peace in that. The writers of the New Testament were convinced of this truth. Paul said ***“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that***

is in Christ Jesus our Lord". (Romans 8:38 & 39) Despite all things that were out there that could shatter his peace, Paul was convinced that this universe was a safe place to be. When you live in that sort of settled assurance, it changes your life.

Picture a mother who is asleep in bed at night during a terrible storm. The thunder is crashing and the lightning flashing. There is a tremendous flash of lightning so she gets out of bed to check on her small son only to find him coming up the hall with a big smile on his face. "Guess what Mum" he says. "I was looking out the window and God took my picture!" That's someone who is convinced that God is at work and that the universe is a perfectly safe place to be.

In Matthew 8 we read about Jesus and his disciples on the lake in a big storm. While the disciples are in the boat all frantic, what is Jesus doing? He's asleep. Why did Matthew find this important enough to recall that Jesus was asleep during a storm? Matthew wants us to understand that Jesus was convinced that this universe was in the hands of his Father and was a perfectly safe place to be. The disciples went to Jesus because they believed he could do something to help them. They had faith **in** Jesus, but they didn't have the faith **of** Jesus. They didn't believe, as Jesus did, that they were safe in the hands of God. They had faith **in** him, but they didn't have **his** faith yet.

2. What Would It Look Like For Me To Have The Peace Of Christ Reigning In Me?

My anxiety level would go way down. I wouldn't be tormented by my inadequacy. I would be an unhurried person. I might have a lot of things to do, but I would have the inner calm and poise that comes from living in the presence of God. I wouldn't say so many of the foolish things that I say, because I wouldn't speak without thinking. I wouldn't be defeated by guilt because I would be living in the calm confidence that God's love is with me forever. I would trust God enough to give. I wouldn't have to hoard.

Worry makes me focus on myself. Worry makes me selfish and small. It robs me of joy, energy and compassion. There is a very strong relational component to peace. Paul's says if all possible live at peace with all people. When the peace of Christ is reigning in our hearts we become an oasis of sanity in a world of pandemonium. A community where the peace of Christ is reigning would change the world.

3. How Can I Increase The Peace Of Christ Of Christ In My Life?

One way that is not an option for Christ followers is to make my primary goal in life living in peaceful comfortable circumstances. That's not what letting the peace of Christ reign is about. It is not an individualistic search for easy living conditions. One of the trends of our society is to move to gated communities with high levels of security and away from anything that might disturb our peace. The peace of Christ reigning within us is not about a search for comfortable circumstances.

Some time back I read the notes of an interview with Rick Warren. Rick Warren is Pastor of Saddleback Church in California, and author of the book "The Purpose Driven Life". His life was turned upside down when his wife discovered she had cancer. This is what he said.

"In a nutshell, life is preparation for eternity. We were not made to last forever, and God wants us to be with Him in Heaven. One day my heart is going to stop, and that will be the end of my body--but not the end of me. I may live 60 to 100 years on earth, but I am going to spend trillions of years in eternity. This is the warm-up act - the dress rehearsal. God wants us to practice on earth what we will do forever in eternity. We were made by God and for God, and until you figure that out, life isn't going to make sense. Life is a series of problems: Either you are in one now, you're just coming out of one, or you're getting ready to go into another one. The reason for this is that God is more interested in your character than your comfort; God is more interested in making your life holy than He is in making your life happy. We can be reasonably happy here on earth, but that's not the goal of life. The goal is to grow in character, in Christ likeness. This past year has been the greatest year of my life but also the toughest, with my wife, Kay, getting cancer. I used to think that life was hills and valleys - you go through a dark time, then you go to the mountaintop, back and forth. I don't believe that anymore. Rather than life being hills and valleys, I believe that it's kind of like two rails on a railroad track, and at all times you have something good and something bad in your life. No matter how good things are in your life, there is always something bad that needs to

be worked on. And no matter how bad things are in your life, there is always something good you can thank God for. You can focus on your purposes, or you can focus on your problems: If you focus on your problems, you're going into self-centeredness, which is my problem, my issues, my pain.' But one of the easiest ways to get rid of pain is to get your focus off yourself and onto God and others."

Here are a couple of ways Paul mentions that can allow the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts.

- **Let The Word Of Christ Dwell In You Richly.**

We are to let all the teachings of Christ make their home in our hearts. Welcome them through the front door of our hearts. Invite them in to a place where they can get comfortable. Welcome the teachings of Christ so much that they take their shoes off, and settle down to stay. Make all the teachings of Jesus feel at home and let them live there permanently. As they settle down in our hearts, we find ourselves thinking the way Jesus would think, and acting the way Jesus would act. When the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, it begins to overflow out of our lives. For example, take the words of Jesus when he said "Don't let your hearts be troubled, don't let them be afraid" and letting those words dwell in us. Choose a thought from scripture each day that leads you to peace, and walk it around all day. Think about it. Dwell on it. Live with it all day.

Isaiah 26:3 says ***"You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you."***

- **Sing Psalms, Hymns And Spiritual Songs With Gratitude In Your Hearts To God.**

Sometimes a song can bring peace in a way that nothing else can. All through the New Testament we find singing. When Mary finds she is pregnant she sings. When Zachariah sees the birth of the baby Jesus he sings. Jesus sang a hymn with his disciples. After Paul and Silas had been stripped of their clothes and beaten with rods then thrown into jail with their feet in the stocks, they sang praises to God.

The Christian faith has always been a singing faith. Singing carries the truth of God in a way nothing else can. We have this amazing ability to learn the truth about Jesus and retain it by remembering the words of songs. And we practice that truth by singing. By the way, there is nothing in this scripture that says we have to sing in tune. So even if you are not particularly tuneful, you can still sing truth. We are going to finish today by singing a hymn that was written in the 1870's. It's a hymn about the peace of God in the midst of tragedy. The first verse goes like this:

***When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.***

When you understand the story behind the words, you have a greater appreciation of how the peace of God can make a difference. The music for the hymn was written by Phillip Bliss, an evangelist and associate of D L Moody, the famous evangelist from Chicago. Phillip Bliss and his wife were traveling on a train when a trestle bridge collapsed. He escaped, but his wife was trapped. When the train caught fire, he ran back to try and save her. They both died in the fire.

The words of the hymn were written by Horatio Spafford, who was a very successful lawyer in Chicago, specializing in property development. He owned a large number of properties on the Chicago waterfront. Spafford was also a committed Christian who was a close friend and supporter of DL Moody. Even though he was wealthy and successful, and a committed Christian, Spafford wasn't shielded from tragedy and trouble. His two year old son died, and not long after, in 1871, there was a huge fire in Chicago that killed 300 people, destroyed 9 square kilometers of the city and left 100,000 people homeless. Spafford lost all his properties overnight.

Spafford decided to take his wife and four daughters to Britain to support Moody in one of his evangelistic campaigns. He couldn't make the sailing, so he sent his wife and four daughters on ahead. The ship they were on was hit by another ship, and it sank within 12 minutes. All of his daughters drowned. Only his wife was saved. Spafford sailed on another ship a few days later.

In his grief, as he passed the spot where his daughters died he wrote these words that we are about to sing.

***When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.***

Spafford went on to have more children, another of whom died from illness when he was four years old. It's the tragedy that surrounds this hymn that makes it so powerful. Only a person of faith can talk about the peace of God in the midst of tragedy. Only a person with the peace of God in their hearts can say, "it is well with my soul."

Sing "It is well with my soul"

Songs take us back to those times when we knew the closeness of the presence of God. Songs remind us of funerals, weddings, the celebration of the birth of a child, and times when the Spirit of God was moving powerfully in our lives. Songs reinforce truths from Gods word. When we sing those songs again we are taken back in our memories and reminded of the peace of Christ which rules in our hearts. Sing songs that lift your spirits and reinforce the truths of what you believe. Sing in the shower. Sing on the way to work. Sing when your job is boring and dull. It doesn't have to be in tune. It's between you and God. It's a way of expressing gratitude. And from your singing will come peace.

Try it this week. Let the word of Christ dwell in you. Welcome truths from the word of God into your heart. Dwell on that truth all week. Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. See what happens. I think you will find the peace of Christ will rule in you. Have a wonderful week.