

Monday, December 8, 2008

PEACE is one of the most elusive conditions of the human heart and mind, yet is passionately sought by each of us, why?

PEACE . . . money can't buy it, an education doesn't guarantee it, political reform doesn't assure it, military might can't impose it, even family and friends cannot provide it consistently. Why?

Like HOPE which we considered last week, PEACE was the ever-present condition from the beginning of time until the serpent brought discord into the garden (Gen. 3). Peace was broken by the dissonant voice of doubt, "did God really say". Suddenly, for the first time, Adam and Eve stopped to consider that maybe God was wrong, perhaps deceitful or manipulative. As they pondered those new possibilities about God, the sense of peace they had always known dissolved and they began to formulate a life plan which did not include God. Contemplation led to a decision, and then action . . . and peace evaporated!

But please note, they were not left with a vacuum, for as peace fled their hearts, minds and even their relationship with each other and with God, rushing in were emotions they had never felt: shame, guilt, anger, resentment . . . and actions they'd never considered: make clothing to cover their innocent beauty; hide when God came to visit etc. By the end of chapter 3 everything had changed, and there was NO Peace. Within 8 verses in chapter 4, their family is in deep turmoil and grieving sibling rivalry which reached murder! Note it well friends, the price of rejecting PEACE is very high!!

The battle for peace rages in two places . . . your mind and your heart . . . your thinking/reasoning, and your emotions. Consider Jeremiah 17:5-10, link it with Isaiah 26:3,4 and Psalm 86. What is God saying about elusive peace? In your life, can you identify those things which drive peace out of your life . . . and what rushes in when peace leaves? Why?

Tuesday, December 9, 2008

The fool sees a recurring problem and the resulting but does nothing to resolve it! We've all experienced this of "peace flight" (when your peace is driven out and replaced by worry, anxiety, fear etc). Since God designed us for peace . . . what are His answers? Consider Psalm 23. Did you know sheep will not "lie down" unless totally at peace, and almost anything will frighten them? Why did Jesus so often refer to us as "sheep"?

Peace is rooted in TRUTH was the first principle I discussed this weekend. Do you agree? Is. 45:19, God says "I speak the truth, I declare what is right." Over and over Jesus said "I will tell you the truth". Satan's primary attack point is distortion of God's truth. Peace needs truth to survive the attack of doubt and resulting confusion. On every page of the Bible, God is proclaiming truth to a human race which so often doesn't want to hear it.

Each of the key people in the Christmas story had to wrestle with illogical news and search for God's truth in the midst of it. Finding that truth, required each of them to define their own concept of God. Was Gabriel really an angel, or an apparition? Did he really come from the presence of God with a message from God or should he be disregarded as a deceiver? If Jesus was going to come to earth as Messiah, would He do so in Bethlehem, (Micah 5:2) through a young Jewish virgin of the family of David, Is 7:14; 9:6,7; 11:1,2?

As Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure, He went to great lengths to teach them in the upper room (John 13-16). Do you see the battle raging in 13; the power of truth in 14; the power of relationship in 15; the power of the Spirit in 16?

Each time we face a set of circumstances that could threaten our peace, we must begin with one fundamental question: what is God's truth in this? It's God's design: peace cannot exist apart from His truth! Peace and untruth cannot co-exist. Are you "untruth" intolerant?

Digging Deeper is also available on our web site: www.calvarycommunity.net.

Thursday, December 11, 2008

Athletes train, students study, musicians rehearse, apprentices learn. I have learned that PEACE is matured in PRACTICE! Peace is not developed laying on the couch watching TV.

In the Christmas story, as each person was exposed to the remarkable "Magnificent Mystery" plan of God, they had to decide . . . run away, or get involved! As they took steps to get involved, it stretched their trust muscles, and developed their Peace potential. Take a moment and look again at Luke 1 & 2 and Matthew 2. Look at what each Christmas participant did in response to God's invitation to involvement . . . and try to assess their "peace".

For Mary, she "got ready and hurried to Elizabeth". While she had agreed to participate with God, she needed help working through what it all meant. Who better to spend time with than her mature relative who really knew God well and was herself living a miracle pregnancy!? Mary took action to engage in the peace process.

I notice Joseph did the same (Matt. 1:24). After Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary would be faced many times with situations which would attack their peace . . . and they practiced peace, they took action trusting God. Remember their late night run to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-16).

Do you notice Jesus did the same? Repeatedly He said He did or said as the Father instructed Him. Often He was faced with rejection and ridicule. In those times Jesus' peace was strengthened as He stood strong on God's Truth, He relied heavily on the love relationship He had with His Father, and He took necessary steps to keep strengthening and protecting His Peace. Do you see that in John 14 & 15?

Look closely at Philippians 4:4-9. Paul is providing an action plan for your peace! Can you identify each specific step? Notice it is very active, never passive . . . yet you would think peace is passive, right? Consider Phil. 1:20-26. Do you see this same deeply rooted peace in practice? Is it yours?

Friday, December 12, 2008

Have you noticed most emotions are contagious? anger, happiness, elation, worry, bitterness . . . all very spread from one person to another. It's true with PEACE! Remember: Peace is Reproduced in PRAISE!

Throughout the Bible God calls people to praise and celebrate Him and His majesty, and do so with other people. Three times annually the Hebrews were invited to make a trip to Jerusalem, if physically possible, for festivals of praise (Deut. 16:16). The "Psalms of Ascents" (Psalm 120-134) were viewed as 15 of the songs sung as the people came from all over Israel to Jerusalem for these great assemblies.

Take a few moments and look carefully at both Zechariah's Song (Luke 1:67-79) and Mary's (Luke 1:46-55). What do you see in both? Moved by the Holy Spirit to express their joy of what God was doing through the "Magnificent Mystery" of the incarnation, their words are powerful and awakened rejoicing in those who heard them. Praise is contagious and brings peace into the hearts and minds of listeners!

As Jesus prayed over His disciples in John 17, don't you suppose they were greatly encouraged? As Solomon prayed and prayed at the Temple dedication (2 Chronicles 6) don't you suppose the people were drawn to a great sense of awe and praise to God? As Isaiah had his powerful praise encounter with God at the Temple (Isaiah 6), do you see a profound peace sweep over him, even though he had gone to the Temple mourning the death of the king?

Listen again to Paul as he writes to His Philippian friends "rejoice in the Lord and I say it again, rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). Have you ever read all four chapters of Philippians and counted sitting and recorded the number of times Paul uses the word like rejoice, or joy? Friends, praise and worship of God and an overflow of a joyful heart spreads peace over all those who hear. It's peace reproduction!!



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