

SERENITY IN CHRIST

Today, we're talking about serenity. Serenity, according to the dictionary is the state of being calm, peaceful, and untroubled. Serenity is something that we desperately want whether we know it or not. Different people have different definitions. Some say it's the absence of war. Some say it's when the sun is out and the birds are singing. For singles, it would be being married. For those married, it would be being single. Some say it's when kids are in school. But we may not come up with a common definition but here's what I do know. That you want it. You want it enough to say you need it in your life. Even if you can't define it I know you want it.

We're in the third part of our series on "Anchored". As I've mentioned in the past couple of weeks, your life must be anchored on something solid, firm, and unchanging in order for you to survive the storms that come your way. That anchor is Jesus Christ. Only he is the one who can give you a firm foundation in life. He is your satisfaction and he is sufficient for your every need. Today, I'd like to give you another reason why you can put your hope in Jesus. It is because you can find serenity in Christ. Let us read together John 16:33:

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Now, as I mentioned earlier, serenity is being peaceful. They are interchangeable. So, from now on I'll just use the word peaceful or peace for simplicity's sake. I hope you have peace about it. Ok? All right?

1. What is Peace?

Let me first give you the biblical definition of peace. The Bible says that peace is the **absence of war**. **Absence of war between me and God.**

Absence of war between others and me. And absence of war in my inner world, in my life – with me.

Colossians 1:20 says “*...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*” Because of what Jesus did on the cross, I don’t have to be at war with God. I can have peace with God because of what Jesus did on the cross.

Also, I can have peace with others. This is a more difficult challenge. Maybe you’ve heard of Charlie Chaplin. One of his famous quotes was, “Oh, I’ve got peace with God all right. It’s just that I don’t have peace with man.” We can understand that.

But these scriptures challenge us to live in peace. Romans 12:18 “*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*” 2 Corinthians 13:11, “*Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*” So, let’s get the picture here. God wants us to have peace with Him. We’re challenged to have peace with others. Then because of what God has already done, we can have peace with ourselves.

Jesus says in John 14:27, “*Peace 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.*”

You see, the peace the world gives is made up of empty promises. For example, everywhere you go you are inundated with promises, from TV commercials, radio ads, billboards, promo flyers, and what-have-you. Even your wife and children and friends give you promises. But most of the time they fall short and do not deliver. Year after year, the Wizards promise to win it all. But what happens?

As we get this picture let me be very, very clear. We're talking about absence of war with God, absence of war with one another, and the absence of war within ourselves. It's different than relaxation. This peace does not mean that there's no longer going to be difficulties or hardships in your life. Actually just the opposite. Peace is the sense of contentment and confidence in the midst of the difficulties.

It means that when some storms are going around in my outer world then in my inner world I can have peace. Does that make sense? That's God's picture of peace. It's what we want. But with all things that we so desperately want, they're not easy to own.

That's why we've got to look at what the PROBLEM is.

2. What is the problem?

The problem is we all have our own list of enemies of peace. In my case, I have a little list and I have a big list. What's in my little list?

Let me give you my little list, my list of enemies to peace – traffic, bills, long lines, hostile people, commercials longer than the show, spam – that's unwanted email, not the food, receiving email stories that I must pass on to everyone I know or else something bad will happen to me. That's my little list. What's on your list? Try to write it down.

Now, my big list is more universal. You might identify with these. Stress. How many of you feel stress during your week? A lot of people. Now, can you guess which is the most stressful city in the US according to the latest study of Forbes? If you guess New York, you're wrong. LA is #1 because of the traffic, high ozone level, and high unemployment rate. NY next while Chicago is third. How about Washington, DC? It is fourth because of traffic congestion. So, that's why just thinking of driving to DC already stresses many of us. Which is what I'm going to do after the service. But good that today is Sunday and that lessens the stress, I hope. If that's an enemy of peace to you, write it down.

Another one to write down is noise. Noise is an enemy of peace. But we love noise. As a matter of fact, when it's silent we get bothered. When it's quiet we say things like, "What's wrong?" We wake up to noise like alarms. My wife wakes up to an alarm. She sets the alarm clock before going to bed and I wake up in the middle of the night to turn it off.

Or sometimes I just wake her up before it goes off. We flip on radios, TVs. When we leave our house we get in our car and we have talk stations or music stations that we listen to. Or we get on the train and the bus and to avoid all the noise of people and trains we put on our headphones to listen to more noise on our cellphones. Coming home we eat dinner in front of Netflix or watch a game of basketball or football. We can go all day long with noise. And that is an enemy of peace.

Another to write down – information overload. We're surrounded by information. On TV, on the internet.

There are cables and satellites offering hundreds of channels most of which you don't really need. But they keep coming to you. And some of us are hooked into their sales pitch that we actually buy what we don't need. Our email boxes are always full. Used to be our mail boxes. It's always coming in and that's an enemy of peace. All this information!

Here's another one to write down: relational conflict. This is a big enemy of peace. If we could just get rid of people... life would be a lot more peaceful, wouldn't it? Charlie Brown says to Lucy, "I love mankind. It's people I can't stand."

Here's the last one to write down: Me. I'm an enemy of peace. Rolly Estabillo. Don't write my name there. You write your own name there. You are an enemy of peace. It's not just the other people around us that create this confusion.

It's me. I'm unsettled. I'm unsettled about my past and I'm uneasy about my present situation. I'm unsure of my future.

What happens when these enemies of peace come into our lives? They put us in this constant reactive state. When the enemies of peace come in we want to react to them.

We have learned these **coping strategies** from when we were little children. Now we're older children and we have learned to cope. You might recognize some of these.

Worry. Worry is a coping strategy. How many of you worry? Raise your hand. How many of you worry a lot? Raise both hands. I can worry about anything. Just give me a subject. My health, my job, my mortgage, my children, my wife, my mother-in-law.

And those of us who worry, we know that the church wants to help. Like the sign I found "Don't let worries kill you. Let the church help." We worry to help cope with the enemies of peace.

Let me give you another way of coping with the enemies of peace. That's **consume**. If we have the financial resources some of us will try to consume in order to buy peace in our lives. Then we always have our eyes on something that I want, that I could get that would bring some peace. That car, that bigger house, whatever it is. Or we try to consume because we want to buy peace for other people. If I can help you, I can bring some peace into my life. I'll get this for you and you'll leave me alone. Parents know this. They buy things for their children so their children will stop pestering them. But we consume to cope with the enemies of peace.

Another thing we do to cope is we **procrastinate**. We say, I don't worry. I don't consume, I just don't do anything. When the enemies of peace come in I just don't do anything. I pretend that they're going to go away.

What these are – worry, consume, procrastinate – they’re just coping strategies. But they put me back in the reactive state. So that when the enemies of stress come in I react then I cope then I react again.

Here’s another one: anger. You can’t have peace when you’re filled with anger. When you’re quick-tempered.

And Here’s a biggie: guilt. Most of the time we feel guilt or shame of something we’ve done in the past. We just can’t let go and it instills fear in our hearts about the future.

You know why I spend a lot of time talking about the problem? If I just paint the picture of what God wants to do in your life and we move immediately to the plan, some of you would love that. Because it’s like a band-aid. We skip the problem. But, you see, peace is an inner thing. It’s deeper than just the surface. And if you don’t identify the problem and you go right to the plan it’s like putting a band-aid on a hemorrhage. We need surgery.

So I wanted to spend some time unfolding it, getting you to think about it enough. And now, let me share with you what the plan is.

3. What is the plan?

I’m calling the plan the spiritual FIX. What I’d like you to do this week is take this passage in Philippians 4 and read it over and over and over this week. Meditate on it. I’m going to read it fairly quickly because we’re going to come back to it with these points. This time, please open your Bibles to Philippians 4:6-9. *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is

excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

You want to take some steps towards peace in your life? The F in this word Spiritual FIX is...

Filter the noise.

This is doing the possible – filtering the noise. Notice I didn’t use the word “delete” because you can’t delete all the noise in life. But you can filter it. If you want to delete it you have to go live a monastic lifestyle somewhere. Find a cave and maybe you’ve got some possibilities there. But in the reality that you and I live in, we can only filter it. Why do we filter the noise? We filter the noise so we can focus on God.

I can’t focus on God when I’m always surrounded by noise. I can’t focus on God when I’m always on the run. It says in verse 8 to think about what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable. Focus on these things. I can’t do that when I’m busy. I can’t do that when I’m always surrounded by noise.

You see, the more time you spend with God you allow God’s presence and His truth to flush through your life and be a part of your life, the more peace you’re going to have.

Let me give you a little coaching on this. Two words.

Unplugged. Unplug some of the noise. It says in Psalms “*Be still and know that I am God.*” We need some time where we unplug. You’ve maybe heard of fasting. It is giving up some food so you can take that time and spend with God and spend more time with God and focus on God. Maybe you take a media fast. Where you unplug sound from your life. I’m not saying a month, I’m not saying a week. For some of you I’m not saying a day. Try a half-hour. See if you could go with silence for even a half-hour. Unplug. Take the challenge.

In my life everything that is plugged in is the opposite of pure, lovely, honorable, true. Unplug.

Another word is, “Lighten up.” I’m not referring to your personality here. I’m referring to your schedule. Some of us in here, we need to lighten up. If you’re a college student, maybe you’re taking way too many units. You are so, so busy that you can’t focus on God. Some of you people that are working in the marketplace. You’re working so many hours to buy peace and you’ve got none of it in your life. You need to lighten up. Those of us in here with kids and we’ve got our kids in sports and lessons and tutors and things like that.

We need to take a hard look at our schedule. You can’t focus on God when you’re surrounded with noise and busyness.

I think it makes me think of a question, Are you afraid to be quiet? Does silence bring you some fear because you might have to face what’s going on? If it does you probably have need of some quiet time, some time where you connect with God.

So I do the possible I Filter the noise. The I in the word “FIX” is Implement the principles.

If you look at verse 9, Paul says “*Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing.*” And the result? “*Then the God of peace will be with you.*”

In other words, apply in your life what you’ve learned from God’s word about who Jesus is, that he is the Prince of Peace, he can give you peace, and all that. Also, apply in your life what Jesus says about forgiveness, compassion, kindness, love, because all these things can bring peace into your life. God’s Word is always relevant. It contains principles for peaceful living. All we need to do is to implement them in our lives.

Filter out the noise. Implement the principles in my life.

The “X” is X-out the enemies of peace.

Your fear, your anger, your guilt. X out or cross out the enemies of peace. Let me just say something about that. X is not just to fit my cute little acronym although that sure does help. But the reason why I like X is because X is the symbol or the initial of Jesus, the Christos. It represents the Greek letter Chi, C-H-I, which, of course, is the first letter in Christos.

And only Jesus can X out or cross out your fear and your anger and your guilt. Only His cross can do it. No counselor can. No pastor can. No self-help book can. No 1-800 number product can. No six figure salary. No raising perfect kids. No straight As. But only Jesus.

Only by the supernatural power of God can He cross out the deeper issues that are keeping peace from your life.

That's what it means in verse 7 when it says to live in Christ Jesus that I would experience God's peace which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand.

Romans 5:1 says "*Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.*"

What has Jesus Christ our Lord done for us? This is what he did. Jesus died on the cross. Because of the cross, He can take my fear. Then, he was buried and rose again on the third day. Because of the resurrection I don't have to fear the future. That God has given me hope for the future. Because of His death on the cross, my sins can be forgiven. The guilt that I am feeling, the shame that I live with was nailed to the cross. God has given me a plan for today and that plan does not include for me to be ripped up and controlled by anger. What the cross did was He took all of that, He took our old nature and He got rid of it.

I want you to see the new. As you see the new would you look at this beautiful passage from 2 Corinthians 5:15-18. It's kind of long but I want you to hear it.

This time I'm going to read from the Message version. Please listen carefully: "*He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own. Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look* [That's all the external stuff. Now watch this] *Now we look inside. What we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start is created new. The old life is gone. A new life burgeon! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him and then called us to settle our relationships with each other.*" It says the new life burgeons!

Let me ask you a question. Where are you spiritually? Have you experienced this new life in Christ? Has God done this for you? And if He has, do you feel His peace? Is He producing peace in that new life? And if not, what does that mean?

Or when I say where are you spiritually, you're sitting there going, No I've never experienced that new life that you're talking about. Can I tell you the good news, the best news of the day for you? God promises to take your old nature to fill you up with His Spirit and allow that new life to begin so you can say goodbye to inner turmoil and say hello to peace.