

Anxious for Nothing: Session 4

The Peace of God

When strolling the streets of Istanbul, Turkey, there is no sight more majestic than the Hagia Sophia. Its central dome, standing 105 feet tall and surrounded by four pencil-shaped minarets stretching more than 200 feet into the heavens, can be spotted from miles away. The dome often serves as a “north star” for lost tourists.

In AD 532, Emperor Justinian I made the Hagia Sophia what it is today. It served as a Christian cathedral for more than a millennium, until AD 1453. That year, the Ottoman Empire took over Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) and declared the Hagia Sophia to be a mosque. Today, it is a museum.

When I (Jenna) stepped into the Hagia Sophia, I could immediately see the layers of history within its walls. Much restoration and repair have peeled back the yellow paint the Ottomans used to cover up Christian symbols and mosaics. One particular mosaic that caught my attention stood over the Imperial Door, which was used only by the emperors.

The mosaic depicts Jesus sitting on a throne of jewels. Some people are around him, but I didn't pay much attention to them. My focus was drawn to his hands. Jesus is holding what looks like an open scroll or book. I couldn't read the words, but after doing a little research I learned they say, “Peace be with you. I am the light of the world.”

Peace be with you.

Written high over the twenty-three-foot-tall oak doors are the words, “Peace be with you.” Written above the doors that more than three million tourists walk through a year are the words, “Peace be with you.” Written above the doors that welcomed emperors who worshiped themselves and sultans who prayed to a different god are the words, “Peace be with you.”

I wonder how many people over the centuries have actually looked at those words and received the invitation. Peace. Not just any peace. God's peace. A peace that surpasses all understanding. And just as this peace frames the doorway of the Hagia Sophia, so it frames our hearts if we will allow it. It's a peace that guards our hearts and minds in Christ.

This peace is a constant invitation in our lives as we walk through the doors of decisions, of relationships, of daily tasks. But how many times do we stop to accept it?

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Question: In your own life; on a scale of 1 to 10; how peaceful do you feel? Is there much that troubles you? Can you put your finger on why that is?

Video: Let's watch the video for today's session.

Tom – easy going – personal bubble of sunshine. Then the bubble burst. Bad headaches. Cancerous brain tumor. Emergency surgery. Uncertain future.

- Has there been a time when the bubble burst for you?

Let's back up a bit... should there even be a bubble in the first place? In other words, does God somehow "owe" us some sort of protection?

We can all handle a difficult situation when it comes up; but what about when two or three crisis happen at the same time? How do we find peace then?

Paul writes to the Philippians about the Peace of God; but only after we do our part:

- Rejoice in the Lord
- Pursue a gentle spirit
- Pray about everything
- Cling to gratitude

Lucado makes the point. It's not a peace *from* God... it is the peace *of* God. This kind of peace is not a human achievement, it is a gift from above.

- *"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."* (John 14:27).

Paul writes to the Philippians, *"forgetting the past and looking to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race..."* (Philippians 3:13).

- How much of your peace is robbed because of the past?

How many of the storms you've faced were storms of your own making?

"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:31).

Lucado points to three things to remember

- We are not alone
- We belong to God
- We're in the Lord's service

"God has not promised a life without storms, but he has promised to be there when you face them."

- Today, let's look up and say yes to the invitation of this beautiful promise.