

Guardians Of Peace

By Scott Runyon

First Baptist Church Birmingham

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Philippians 4:4-9

With Jesus' birth behind us and a new year dawning ahead of us, we are considering today a life of peace.

Matthew had "known" God his whole life, but never was really committed. At 23-years-old, he was invited and agreed to go on a retreat with his pastor and a group of 20 other guys from church to a place called *Land Between the Lakes*. While there he had a life altering experience of God.

His pastor invited all the guys to take four hours one morning for individual prayer time. As anyone his age who had never done such a thing might do, he spent the first hour wondering how he was going to pray for four hours and then trying really hard to get all the distractions out of his head. In others words he was trying to "do it right" but unsure how.

The second hour he spent feeling guilty for thinking only about himself for the first hour, which of course left him feeling embarrassed.

It wasn't until the third hour that Matthew was able to let go of most everything else and focus on praying. What helped him was walking down to the lake.

In the lake, choppy waves splashed up onto the shore near where he sat. These helped him to focus. In that space, a scripture verse came to Matthew: 1 Peter 5:7. "Cast all your anxiety on God because God cares for you."

The verse got hold of him and he couldn't let it go. It shifted from a general idea to a very personal one from God who was asking him to give all of his anxiety to God, because God cared for him and loved him right there and then, just as he was. It was profound!

In the middle of praying, he got up and began walking along the shore admiring the beauty of God's creation. Then it dawned on him that although the lake's water was choppy there seemed to be no wind to fuel it. This was perplexing to him.

The choppy water became a metaphor for his life. Like the choppy water with no wind, he felt there was no reason for his life being so full of anxiety.

Right there by the lake, Matthew had a profound experience of God's love for him. As he was

thinking about the waves and his life, he saw a rock that had been dry with all of these waves splashing around. The rock finally caught a big wave and was submerged. Immediately, he felt the need to be baptized like the rock, demonstrating his desire to take a step deeper in his faith.

He immediately ran to share this with his pastor. There was a wonderful joy and support for Matthew among the men. So, after lunch they all went right down to the lake, the men prayed over him, and his pastor baptized him.

One of the things Matthew cherishes most about that day was after getting baptized looking out over the lake. This was the lake that was choppy earlier in the day, but after he was baptized, it was the calmest, most peaceful lake he could imagine.

He said about that moment,

I felt like the stillness of the lake reflected my renewed and peaceful spirit after being baptized. I kept thinking, "God, I love you." From that moment, I have been dedicating every day of my life to Him.

In today's passage, Paul was writing to a group of people in the city of Philippi. Apparently there

were several people who had gotten into a fight and were hurting each other and therefore the community was hurting.

They were in need of peace.

READ PHILIPPINES 4:4-9

This passage says that when peace reigns it will guard our hearts and minds. At the same time, we must also be guardians of peace for others.

Peace is critical for our lives in Christ to truly work. Let's think about this. What does peace offer us?

Peace offers space to breathe. In a time when our breath has become shallow and less able to nourish our bodies, our attention is being drawn to the most demanding requests around us. Peace offers the space to breathe deeply, filling our whole bodies and even our souls with life.

Peace offers space to rest and heal. In a time when we burn the candle at both ends working late into the evening and rising early to get a head start on the new day, our life energy is being drained. Peace offers the space to rest allowing our bodies to restore and heal.

Peace offers space to be rejuvenated. In a time when we wear ourselves down working hard to fulfill our obligations and expectations at home with family and at work, and then sometimes cutting vacations short because we just can't afford to be away. Peace offers the space to be rejuvenated and refreshed in the present moment so that our mind can again become sharp and focused while our soul's vitality is rekindled.

Peace offers space to simply be. In a time when doing and producing is our way of life and give us our identity, we work hard to prove ourselves worthy. Peace offers the space to simply be, and we realize that **being** is enough.

In these ways, peace guards and protects our hearts, minds, and spirits allowing us to simply be God's people, whole and dearly loved.

We all need what peace offers.

At the same time, it is our responsibility to be guardians of peace for others that they might have this precious life-giving gift.

What does this mean? How do we become guardians of peace?

Honestly, the simple answer is that we embody the gospel. This

means that we turn our attention away from things that divide, foster fear, complicate life, aggravate, condemn, judge, and disrupt.

Then, as ambassadors of peace, we turn our attention toward things that are true, honorable, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy.

When attention is geared this direction our lives become a celebration of God's presence in the world. This is the spirit of Paul when he wrote "Rejoice in the Lord always!"

When we do this, our lives become the bedrock of God's kingdom in this world, guarding and protecting peace for all around us.

I don't know if any of you are action movie fans, but I am. Hollywood has released two movies from Marvel Comics called Guardians of the Galaxy, the first hit theaters in 2014. These movies center on a misfit crew from all over the galaxy who get thrown together by a series of events to become both friends and comrades with a mission of guarding the galaxy from those who might harm and disrupt.

It's an interesting crew. They have a super smart raccoon named Rocket, a walking tree named

Groot who only says three words: “I am Groot,” a green orphan alien named Gamora, and a big, strong, if not simple-minded, bluish-grey guy named Drax.

Peter Quill, who calls himself “Star Lord” is the only human in the bunch and becomes the leader of this unlikely rag tag crew.

Each of them individually may only create a little ripple in their corner of the galaxy, and when they come together they often fight over little stuff.

In some ways they might reflect the diverse and rag tag community we are in Christ.

But here is the whole point. These misfits become something amazing together despite their great differences for two reasons. First, they go through dramatic difficulties together, and two, they discover a common goal that unites them. Along the way, they draw strength from each other and keep each other accountable to the higher purpose of protecting the well-being of others.

We also have a mission that God has given us to be guardians of peace.

When we grasp our higher purpose together, the grand calling of being

guardians of peace, we can bond together around this common goal against any great challenges that we face. This allows us to establish and deepen God’s kingdom in this world.

Doing this is a choice that runs in conflict with the mode of our culture that would have us think on every disaster, every catastrophe, and every bad news report.

The media has long lived by the mantra “If it bleeds it leads” leading them to publish and broadcast the most distressing of stories they can find. This seems to be what grabs people’s attention and pays their bills.

But we are not bound to that mantra. Instead we are encouraged by Paul to choose the direction of our attention, focusing on things that are good and pleasing. Remember that whatever we focus our attention on will determine the shape of our hearts and minds and lives.

So let us choose to be guardians of peace and think on things that are true, honorable, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Let us allow these things to shape our lives, our families, our communities and our world so that peace will reign in God’s kingdom right here!