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Order Of Worship (Liturgy)

Congregation: **First United Reformed Church**
Oak Lawn, Illinois
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Like A River Glorious
 All Who with Heart Confiding
 God Moves in a Mysterious Way
 When Peace Like a River

Title: **Perfect Peace**
Text: [Isaiah 26:1-12 \(View\)](#)
Occasion: [Regular Sunday](#)
Topic: [Comfort in a World of Pain](#)

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“Perfect Peace” Isaiah 26:1-12

Charles Haddon Spurgeon described a martyr who was tied to the stake ready to be burned to death. His executioner was anguished and dreaded starting the fire, but the order had come from the king calling for the death of the Christian. What else could he do?

The Christian who was being martyred, seeing anguish in the executioner's face said, “Come, and lay your hand on my heart, and see if it does not beat quietly.” The executioner did so, and found that the man was calm. “Now,” said the man who was being martyred, “put your hand on your own heart, and see if you are not more troubled than I am. Then go your way, and instead of pitying me, pity yourself.”

Spurgeon didn't give the date when that Christian man was martyred, but we know that throughout history God's people have been persecuted and martyred, just as Scripture and the Lord Jesus Christ himself had foretold.

Isaiah certainly experienced that. He was a prophet who was commissioned by God to call Judah and Jerusalem to repentance. He began his ministry about 740 years before the birth of Jesus. At that time, the people of Judah and Jerusalem were chasing after the things of the world; they seldom acknowledged God and they made light of His Word. Judah was a wicked nation, and they were surrounded by wicked nations. Yet amid all the wickedness, violence, and persecution that Isaiah faced, he wrote about perfect peace.

Verse 3 describes a peace that only a Christian can have. Verse 3 is an accurate description of the peace that the martyr had when the executioner's heart beat way faster than his. Isaiah writes, “*You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.*” That verse

should be of great encouragement to you and to me, and to Christians around the world. We live in a world saturated with sin, evil seems to dominate, and believers around the globe are persecuted severely. And yet, regardless of the evil violence of this world, we too are given perfect peace through saving faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

In this passage we see that the most important peace that anyone can have is peace with God. How was it possible that the Christian who was being martyred could be so calm as his executioner gathered the wood for the fire that would burn the Christian to death?

The reason the Christian remained calm is that he had peace with God. There was no doubt in his mind where he was going, because the enmity between himself and God had been bridged by the redeeming work and shed blood of Jesus Christ. He knew that he belonged to Christ in life and in death. He experienced the truth of Philippians 1:21: *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”* Because his faith was focused on Christ alone for salvation, he knew that nothing – not even a martyr’s death – could separate him from his Savior. He was *“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.”* (Rom. 8:38, 39)

He also knew, as does every repentant believer, that all of us are born as children of wrath and are by nature at enmity with God. In the words of Ephesians 2:1-3: *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”*

But Christ, who is the Prince of Peace, has reconciled all who have saving faith in him alone to God the Father. There is no greater peace than the peace that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have. It is described in Romans 5:1-2 this way: *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand...”* Romans 8:1 adds, *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

And the passage from Ephesians 2, which graphically describes our sinful condition in the opening verses, goes on to say: *“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”*

The peace that is given to us through faith in Christ surpasses all understanding. The anxious executioner could not understand how the Christian could face martyrdom with a calm heart. The peace that we have from God is truly beyond comprehension. Writing to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul, in jail, wrote to a small struggling church in Philippi: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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.”* (Phil. 4:6, 7)

Eric Parker was a missionary in Portugal during World War II. Because he and his family were in a dangerous place, he was advised to send his wife and children back to England. For their own safety, he did so. Then, on the first Sunday after they left, he received a telegraphed message just before the Sunday service. The congregation wanted to know about his family. What did the message say?

He announced to the congregation that he had just received word that his family had all arrived home safely. Afterwards, it was learned that the home they had arrived safely to was their heavenly home. The boat they were on had been torpedoed by the enemy and all aboard had been drowned.

How could Eric Parker have perfect peace in such a situation? It was because his mind was steadfast on the Lord, and he knew the peace which surpasses all understanding. And that peace comes only to those who truly know Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin and Lord of their lives.

Peace with God; Peace with Others

When we have peace with God, we will also have peace with others. Isaiah and the remnant of believers in Judah, through faith in the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, had peace not only with God but also with one another.

It was undoubtedly a great blessing to them because they, like we and Christians in every era of time, were outnumbered. Judah and Israel had both turned from the teaching of the Lord. Verse 10 gives a tragic picture of their society. In God's timeless Word it also paints a picture of our own society. Verse 10: *"Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in the land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the Lord."*

We look at our own society and see that there is no regard for the majesty of the Lord. Even in a society that stamps "IN GOD WE TRUST" on every coin, most of our culture in the United States continues on an evil path, just as back in the days of Isaiah.

But even when a culture is dead set against Christians, martyring them as the Christian whom Spurgeon wrote about, there is yet peace among believers. We are strengthened by the ties of faith that we have with one another, and we realize our need for each other in the hostility of the world and in the pilgrimage of life.

It is only when we have peace with God that we truly comprehend what it is to have peace with others: We know what it is like to be forgiven and so we find it is easier to forgive others. We see the enormity of our sin. We see God's righteous and proper wrath against sin. We see that Christ bore the curse, for our sin "not in part but the whole."

And as we see and experience God's grace and forgiveness in our lives, we find it much easier to forgive those who sin against us. By God's sanctifying Spirit within us we can then take passages like Colossians 3:13 to heart: *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."* Or, in the words of Ephesians 4:32: *"Be kind and tenderhearted to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you."*

Another component of having peace with others comes as we recognize that Christ is the head of the body and that every believer is a member of His body. As such, we see that it is good that we are not all the same. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:12, *"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ."*

And he adds: *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body."* (1 Cor. 12:15-19)

Consequently, we don't look down on those who don't have the same gifts that God has given to us. Instead we rejoice that God has given all his people different gifts and abilities which harmonize together for the good of the body of Christ. And we rejoice that we who are so diverse, yet form one harmonious body.

Ephesians chapter 2 is as direct a chapter as any in explaining that whatever our background or nationality is, we truly are one body of believers in Christ. In that chapter Paul describes how Jews and Gentiles had deep hostility for each other. But through the common bond of faith in Jesus Christ those hostilities were broken down and people, no matter what their background, nationality, or color, become one in Christ. Ephesians 2:14 declares: *"He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility."*

And because we have peace with one another, and because we work together in harmony, we can stand strong against the opposition of the world, even as we hold out the love of Christ into a hostile culture.

Peace with Circumstances

Not only do those who trust in the Lord have peace with him and with others, but also with circumstances, even when circumstances are excruciatingly hard. Isaiah's circumstances were certainly difficult. He was to be a faithful, godly prophet to a nation that wanted nothing to do with the Lord.

Yet Isaiah writes about perfect peace even while facing great adversity. Unbelieving people have a hard time understanding how any Christian, whether in Isaiah's day or today, can have perfect peace amid even the hardest circumstances of life. They fail to grasp that our sovereign God works out all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

Yet as believers I'm sure we have all found the truth that William Cowper penned in his familiar hymn, when he wrote:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
and rides upon the storm.

His purposes will ripen fast,
unfolding every hour;
the bud may have a bitter taste,
but sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
and He will make it plain.

Cowper wrote that from personal experience. Before God graciously worked in his life, he had tried to commit suicide many times. Each time failed and perhaps each time brought Cowper to the realization that God had a plan and a purpose for his life.

In the course of our lives, especially as we reflect back in retrospect, we see that God does indeed have a purpose and a plan for our lives. And we see that he works that plan out through His providence in mysterious and wonderful ways, even – or especially – in the hardest circumstances of life.

Perhaps you have heard about the Christian who was stranded on a remote island. He had prayed and prayed, but no one came to his rescue. One day he returned from the water's edge to a little hut that he had built on higher ground, only to find that the hut was on fire. His heart sank. His first reaction was, "Why, Lord, Why?" But he gave it over to the Lord and slept under the stars that night trusting that the Lord must have some other provision for him since his hut had burned to the ground.

In the morning he was awakened to the sound of rescuers. A ship was coming to the shore and the people on the ship yelled out to him, "Yesterday we saw all the smoke from your fire!"

The Lord does not always turn our troubles to good overnight. Isaiah's life was filled with difficulty throughout, and it appears that he died a martyr's death. Yet because our God is sovereign, when – by his grace and Spirit's power our trust and faith is truly placed in him alone – we can indeed have the perfect peace that Isaiah also experienced in the troubles of his life.

Through saving faith in Christ we have peace with God, peace with each other, and peace with our circumstances. That is part of what makes it perfect; it is a trifecta of God's grace which is multiplied to us. As Jude points out in verse 2 of his short letter, *"To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you."* (ESV)

God's peace, mercy, and love, are not just added to our lives, but multiplied. If you had four blessings and then four more were added, that would be wonderful. But when multiplied, the four blessings become sixteen blessings. And those sixteen blessings multiplied by sixteen more equal two hundred fifty-six blessings! No wonder the apostle Paul concludes the third chapter of Ephesians with an exclamation mark: *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!"* (Eph. 3:20, 21)

Peace Through the Prince of Peace

By way of application, we see that only the Lord is able to give perfect peace. Peace is elusive. Throughout the history of the world people have looked for peace but most have not found it. The reason why that is, is that only the Lord gives true peace. In verse 12 Isaiah writes, *"Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us."* It is the Lord who establishes peace for his people and he does so through the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Christ is the Prince of Peace, and the peace he gives has a dual aspect. The word "shalom" for peace not only describes the removal of turmoil and dissension. It also describes positive blessings. In other words, Christ not only removes from us our fears and uncertainties, as we cast all our cares and anxieties on him, knowing that he cares for us – but in their place he gives us the sure promise of complete fulfillment in him, a complete fulfillment described in John 1:16 where John declares, *"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another."* Part of shalom – true, biblical perfect peace – is realizing, even when our world seems to be falling apart, that our Lord provides his perfect peace which surpasses all understanding.

But part of knowing the peace that surpasses understanding is a continuing trust in Him, it is a continual effort to walk in the light of His Word. It is only then that we have true peace. That is why verse 4 tells us, *"Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal."* The person who builds his house upon the solid rock of Jesus Christ will have peace even in the great storms of life. But the person who builds his house upon the sinking sands of this world's philosophies will find no peace when the storms of life come their way.

Building a house is similar to building a city. After all, every city is comprised primarily of houses and the businesses that support and supply the residents of the city. But there is a great difference between cities. Did you notice the two cities described in Isaiah 26? In verse 1 we read:

*In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:
We have a strong city;
God makes salvation
its walls and ramparts.*

*Verse 5 - He humbles those who dwell on high,
he lays the lofty city low;
he levels it to the ground
and casts it down to the dust.*

Those verses remind us that in this world, spiritually and figuratively, there are two cities. There is Jerusalem, the heavenly city. The Lord protects and provides for that city. As verse 1 points out *“God makes salvation its walls and ramparts.”*

And there is Babylon, the city that is the epitome of evil. Babylon as a city represents this world in all its hatred, malice, and persecution of believers. But in the words of verse 5, the Lord *“lays the lofty city low; he levels it to the ground and casts it down to the dust.”* And Revelation 18 records the fall of that great city, the city of Babylon.

There is no peace for those in Babylon, not in this world and certainly not in the world to come. No matter how hard unbelievers search for peace they come up empty. All the promises of peace that the ungodly pursue dissipate and leave a deep, empty void. As Isaiah 57:20-21 puts it: *“But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”*

It is only in the Lord that we find that perfect peace, and to know that peace our minds must remain steadfast on Him. As verse 3 says, *“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.”*

When Peter took his eyes off the Lord, he sank. So did the spirit of the man who was stranded on the island, when he focused on his burning hut instead of the sovereign work of his heavenly Father. But when he focused again on God's sovereignty, he slept the sleep of the righteous and found in the morning that God indeed was working all things for his good.

Living in Florida for a number of years, my family and I became familiar with the hurricanes that can come up either coast. They spawn tornadoes, violent thunderstorms, flooding rains, devastating winds. Yet in the center of the hurricane – in the “eye” of the storm – there is perfect calm, perfect peace.

The same is true for us in the pilgrimage of life. When we have the Lord in the center of our life – when by the Holy Spirit's power we know the Father through saving faith in the Son, the Rock of our salvation – we will find peace in the knowledge that the Lord holds us in the palm of his hand with a tender yet powerful grip so that no one – and nothing – can snatch us away.

His promise is not that he will remove all our troubles, but that through them he will hold us securely, and he will also use those trials to sanctify us. Even when he doesn't rescue us from hard circumstances the day after they occur, as he did with the man whose hut burned to the ground, he promises to give us an extra measure of his grace to endure the circumstances we face with an inner peace that surpasses understanding.

Consider how the Lord granted that perfect peace to the Apostle Paul when the thorn remained in his flesh, even though he had repeatedly prayed that the Lord would remove it. The Lord did not remove the thorn, but gave this promise: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*

What is the greater blessing? To have an easy life, with the thorn removed? Or to have the promise of increased grace from Almighty God? Is it a greater blessing to have the thorn removed? Or to know without doubt that whatever the pain, whatever the hardship, whatever sin plagues our soul, God’s grace is yet sufficient to see us through?

Obviously, the latter is the greater blessing, a blessing that caused Paul to write, *“Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

And the Lord gives the promise of His all-sufficient grace to everyone whose mind is steadfast, trusting in Christ alone. As Jesus said, in John 16:33, after telling his disciples how he would suffer and die, *“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.”*

Walking in the Way

And then, as our minds remain steadfast on the Lord, thankful for his promises, we are to obediently wait on him, with his name and renown the desire of our hearts. As verse 8 puts it: *“Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you.”*

Isaiah stands as an example of someone who did just that. He sought to walk in the way of the Lord, waiting upon God, even as he had to warn the nation of Judah about the impending judgment of God on them because of their sinfulness. Although his culture was corrupt to the core, Isaiah sought the honor and glory of God’s name and renown. The yearning of his heart and soul was that God would be glorified as he humbled the wicked and gave strength to the righteous.

It was not an easy life for Isaiah. And yet it was a life in which he undoubtedly knew that perfect peace with God, peace with other believers, and peace with his circumstances. Is the same true of you and of me? Is our mind focused steadfastly upon the Lord? Is the Messiah of the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ, the focus of your trust and faith and mine? Is He truly the Rock eternal to you and to me? Are you and I building our life on the solid foundation – the solid Rock of Christ?

If so, whatever comes into your life this week or in the future, you can be assured that God will grant you that perfect peace that surpasses all understanding. You can be assured, for the Lord is the one who establishes peace for his people through the reconciling work of his eternal Son, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, the only Savior from sin, and the Lord of our lives. Amen.

sermon outline:

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

“Perfect Peace”
Isaiah 26:1-12

I. Although Isaiah lived in a wicked and violent culture (10) he wrote about perfect peace (3). The Lord gives perfect peace to those who by His grace trust in Him alone. Through saving faith in Christ we have:

- 1) Peace with God (Rom. 5:1) and the peace of God (Phil. 4:6, 7)

- 2) Peace with others (Eph. 2:14; 1 Cor. 12:12ff; Col. 3:13, 15)

- 3) Peace with circumstances (Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 12:9; Phil. 4:12-13)

II. Applications:

- 1) Only the Lord is able to give perfect peace (3, 12)

- 2) Our minds must remain steadfast on Him (3, 4)

- 3) We are to obediently wait on Him, with His name and renown the desire of our hearts (8, 9)

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