

“THE LORD OF PEACE”

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Intro: I am not beginning a new series of messages today, but because of the trials that are affecting so many of us right now, it seemed wise to me for us to think together about peace. And, as the Apostle Paul said about another matter, “I think also that I have the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 7:40). By this he meant that he believed that he had the mind of the Spirit on the subject. It is not always easy to know the will of God concerning any time of ministry, but the Lord does lead when we are looking to Him.

Peace is a prominent theme throughout the Bible. Often peace is what the writers of Scripture have in mind even though they may not use the word. Psalm 23, for example, is all about peace. The first time the word “peace” is used in the Bible is in Genesis 15:15 where the Lord was explaining to Abraham that there would be a period of approximately four hundred years before his descendants would possess the land in which he was at that time a stranger. And, after assuring Abraham of the certainty of the Lord’s promise, the Lord gave Abraham this further promise:

And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age (Gen. 15:15).

By this the Lord meant that Abraham would die fully assured that God’s promise was true and that it would be fulfilled.

“Peace” became, and still is, the ordinary greeting of the Jewish people – and it still is! Transliterated into English it is the word, *shalom*! Even the Lord Jesus used this word many times as we learn from the Gospels. One of the most important times when the Lord used this greeting was when He appeared to His disciples for the first time following His resurrection. This is John’s account of that incident:

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you (John 20:19).

We know that the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter used this word in their epistles as they said something like this: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:7b). And this was both a greeting and a prayer.

But what exactly do we mean when we speak of peace? We hear politicians speaking all of the time about peace. They are thinking of a world without war. A world in which everyone will have all that they need, and they think that this will solve international problems as well as the social problems in individual nations. But we have never had a world without war. And it is total ignorance to think that people ever have all that they need or want. The more people have, the more they want. And so we have our leaders talking peace when really, as we consider the world, few people know what real peace is.

And so it would be a good starting point in considering “peace” to define exactly what the Bible has in mind when it speaks of peace over and over again.

I. WHAT IS PEACE?

Actually the word has a variety of meanings, and you always have to examine the context to determine how it is used in particular verses. It can mean good health, or prosperity in a material way. It sometimes means safety. Used in a greeting it means that the person speaking is wishing the one he meets all that is necessary for his or her welfare. The best that non-Christians can make of the word “peace” is simply *a wish*, but with the people of God it becomes a prayer. We know only the Lord can grant us true and lasting peace. It is like we say to each other, “Have a good day!” But with those of us who are Christians we should always say that as a prayer that the person we are greeting will enjoy the blessing of the Lord.

But I still haven’t gotten to the deepest meaning of peace as it is used in the Bible. We are all thankful when we are not at war. When we were in Nagasaki, Japan Tim took us to the Atomic Bomb Museum, and Gary and Martha and Lucille and I found that to be a very sobering experience. They had pictures of the destruction caused by our atomic bomb when it was dropped on that city, fragments of clothing that were blown off of people, the destruction of a large part of the city, babies and children who were killed along with adults – and it made all of us sick at heart to see the destruction. There is nothing nice about war, and we can be thankful when we are not at war. It would be wonderful to live in a world where there would be no more war, but that will not be until our Lord comes to rule on the earth.

Also we are all thankful, aren't we when we have good health. But everybody gets sick. And as we get older there are things about our bodies that go wrong. Hospitals are very busy places. Doctors and nurses have all that they can do to keep us going. We don't like to be sick, or to have things wrong with us, and neither are we happy when others are sick. So if we used the greeting, "peace," we would include that too.

In the same way we don't like to know that there are people who are hungry and who need clothing and perhaps even a place to live. We are concerned about the welfare of our families and friends, but we wish there were no such needs anywhere in the world.

But we have to face reality that there are going to be wars, and there will be sickness and death, and there will always be people who do not have warm clothes to wear or proper food to eat. Are these the only things that are included in this word *peace*?

We can thank God that we don't have more wars than we do. And we can thank God that we aren't sick all of the time. And we can thank God for the homes we live in, and the food that is on our tables, and for the clothes we have to wear. But our needs, as important as all of these are, go much deeper than what I have mentioned so far. *Peace is that inner quietness of heart that God gives us regardless of what our outward circumstances might be, because we know that everything is under His control, in all things God is fulfilling His purposes, and ultimately everything is designed for His glory and for our good. True peace comes from really believing in the sovereignty of God and in the goodness of God.* It is no wonder that the children of Israel were taught to say over and over again, "O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever" (Psa. 136:1). Things may be rough at the present time, but God is still in charge; He is still good; and His mercy is just as available as it was when our circumstances were altogether different.

So when we as believers wish each other "peace," with all of the other good wishes we include, we are thinking always of *peace of heart*! But one reason people do not enjoy peace of heart is because they have never learned where true peace begins.

Where does it begin? Peace in our heart begins when we have peace with God. So let us think about that for a moment.

II. PEACE WITH GOD.

I was recently reminded of how corrupt people's thinking is when I read that many of our leaders on all levels were urging people to take part in a National Day of Prayer. Just who many of them would be praying to, I don't know, but people have the idea that God is someone or something that we can pray to when we are in trouble, but we can still go on doing what we want to do even though it may be abominable in God's sight. There can be no real inner peace until first of all we have experienced peace with God.

Most of you know what I mean, but most people in the world have never been told this, or if they have, they have forgotten it. People need to know that we are under God's judgment because of our sin. That's why I said a moment ago it is amazing that we are not in war all of the time, or that we are sick all of time, or that we are hungry all of the time. And the problem is our sin. And to think that we can pray to God for His blessing when all of the time we as a nation are grievously sinning against Him, is utter nonsense of the worst kind. If we want peace, we have to make peace with Him, and there is only one way of peace with God and that is through faith in what the Lord Jesus Christ did when He died for sinners two thousand years ago on Calvary's Cross. Contrary to what we may think, there is only one way of salvation – and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul stated it this way in Romans 5:1:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God sent His Son into the world to die for sinners. He paid the penalty in full for everyone who turns to Him to be forgiven of sin. And it is only forgiven sinners who are declared righteous, the charges are dropped, and peace with God is established. This is what it means to be saved.

Do you have "peace with God"? Are you trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation – and only in Him? You have to have "peace with God" before you can enjoy "the peace of God" in the depth of your heart.

Now this brings me to my text and to what Paul said about:

III. "THE LORD OF PEACE" (2 Thess. 3:16).

Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all (2 Thess. 3:16).

Let me ask you: Do you believe that such a life is possible? It has to be or the Apostle Paul would not have prayed that way! Does this mean that there won't be struggles, and tears, and perhaps even doubts? No, it doesn't mean that. There will be struggles and tears and doubts as we seek peace from "the Lord of peace." But the Lord gives peace through all of the trials of our lives, a deep, abiding, strengthening peace even though the tears may flow.

And will you notice that the Apostle Paul said, "The Lord Himself give you peace always." He draws near us in a special way when we are deep in trials, and He doesn't assign this task of peace to angels, but He does it Himself to each one of us individually. And I think that here Paul was speaking about the Lord Jesus. What a precious thought this is! Think about it, and thank God for it, and believe that it is for you right where you are with that burden that weighs you down. (Repeat the verse.)

But notice that Paul mentioned "by all means." What are "means"? My dictionary defines *means* as "that by which something is done or obtained" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, p. 465). The NKJV renders this, "in every way." What are some of the ways God ministers peace to our hearts?

IV. THE WAYS THE LORD GIVES US PEACE.

A. The Word of God.

Illus: The time when Robert Harkness came to our church, and offered to write a chorus on a verse someone might give to him. A lady suggested Psalms 119:165, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

"The law" here stands for all of the Word, and this one reason is why it is so important to be reading the Word every day. It is through the Word that the Lord ministers peace to us.

B. God Himself.

And here I would cite for you Isa. 26:3-4:

3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

4 Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength:

How easy in our trials it is for us to get focused on our trials, and to forget the Lord! In reading the Word we should be learning more and more about the Lord, learning about His Deity, His mighty power, His infinite wisdom, His inexhaustible mercy and grace, His purposes, His unchanging love – and all of His glorious attributes. Oh, how we need to stay focused upon the Lord.

But let me give you a third means:

C. Prayer.

And here I would remind you of Phil. 4:6-7:

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Don't wait to pray until some trial comes along. Be praying regularly, daily, and even many times a day. Don't allow yourself to be worried about anything, is what Paul was saying. And he wasn't ignorant that there are many things that could really cause us to worry. But take your worries to the Lord, and cast your burden upon Him.

Let me mention one more means that God always uses to help us when troubles come our way.

D. The Lord's people.

Don't you know that it was encouraging, very encouraging, to the people of God in Thessalonica, to read these words of our text? Let me read them to you again:

16 Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all (2 Thess. 3:16).

And then he concluded the epistle with these words:

17 The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen
(2 Thess. 3:17-18).

After saying that “the Lord Himself” would give them peace, then in these last two verses Paul was saying, “I myself am sending you this greeting.”

Isn't it wonderful when people who know the Lord say to us, or write to us, saying, “I just want you to know that I am praying for you”? That is a very powerful means that God uses of ministering peace to our hearts when we are troubled. And when we say that, or write it, let's be sure that we do it.

Concl: Doubtless there are other “means” that the Lord uses to bring peace to our hearts, but these four are very comprehensive and cover a lot of ground. It is wonderful to know that we have *peace with God*, but it is equally wonderful that we can enjoy *the peace of God*, not just when we are under heavy burdens, but day by day and moment by moment as we walk in daily fellowship with our wonderful Lord. Let us thank Him for the truth He has given us in this one verse. It is evidence that He truly cares for each of us all of the time.