

# Peace

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Littlebourne - 8th December 2024 - Isaiah 52:7-10 & Luke 1:67-79

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## What is peace?

We use the word peace today in different ways - what someone means when they say 'world peace' is quite different than what is meant by themselves being 'at peace'. We talk about peace in terms of not having noisy neighbours and in terms of geopolitical fantasy. So what we today mean by 'peace' is wildly broad. We need to understand what the Bible means by peace.

## Cessation of hostilities

One aspect of peace is cessation of hostilities. Peace is when warring parties stop warring, or when no conflict is present. We can use the word quite flippantly - we look at North and South Korea and see some sort of 'peace'. It's a long time since the 1953 armistice, and yes there have been some incidents, but it's been much more peaceful than the years before. The soldiers probably get some peace and quiet in their guard towers overlooking the demilitarised zone. But of course, it's not real peace. Both sides have a lot of military hardware pointed the other way - both sides are really at war still, both officially in that they only have a ceasefire and in practice even if they're not shooting right now. The finger is on the trigger so to speak, ready to break the peace at any moment - it's not really a true peace.

True peace is not just a situation where people agree to keep their feelings of anger private or under control. You're not really at peace with someone just because your hatred is kept under wraps. True peace is found in *cessation* of hostility - in actually no longer hating and being hostile to others, whether that hostility is private or public.

Proverbs tells us about those that hate, but try and cover it up. Proverbs 26:24-26:

*24 Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips  
and harbors deceit in his heart;  
25 when he speaks graciously, believe him not,  
for there are seven abominations in his heart;  
26 though his hatred be covered with deception,  
his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.*

In the end, real peace and false peace will be found out.

## Freedom from anxiety

Another way we use the word peace is to mean freedom from worry or anxiety. People talk about 'inner peace' for example. Typically we hear about this in a secular context in terms of meditation, yoga, self-acceptance, or on the better end of things, in general physical health and maintaining healthy relationships.

Now some of this is good - we should feel more 'at peace' when we are doing good things and have a good lifestyle. But some of it isn't as good - this drive to be 'at peace' when we're not really at peace. An attitude of pretending that things are ok, when they aren't. Just wanting to feel good.

## What does the Bible tell us that true peace is?

Both of these conceptions of peace - both cessation of hostilities and freedom from anxiety - are negative conceptions. They're things defined by absence of something. Peace is the absence of conflict or absence of worry.

The Bible tells us something I think a bit more positive.

The hebrew word for peace, as used in Isaiah, is Shalom. It's used 240 times in the Old Testament. Shalom means completeness, safety and soundness, health and prosperity. It's used in our meanings of the word and more - as a positive trait.

Isaiah 26:3 says:

*You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.*

Shalom is used to describe close friendship - Psalm 55:18 says 'my close friend in whom I trusted', literally my 'shalom' friend.

Shalom is the word for peace at the end of the aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:24-26):

*"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."*

Shalom is about divine favour - not just absence of conflict, but positive favour toward others. Shalom peace is a prosperous and happy condition, a state of blessing.

And Shalom implies a lasting peace - not a temporary reprieve, Ezekiel 37:26:

*I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant.*

## **Isaiah 52:7-10**

*How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings good news,  
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,  
who publishes salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."  
8 The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;  
together they sing for joy;  
for eye to eye they see  
the return of the Lord to Zion.  
9 Break forth together into singing,  
you waste places of Jerusalem,  
for the Lord has comforted his people;  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.  
10 The Lord has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God.*

Isaiah tells us here - in what is a prophecy of the evangelism of John the Baptist, the Apostles, and even ourselves - of the beauty of those that bring good news, that bring gospel. Those that announce peace and salvation - who let everyone know about this peace and salvation that is accomplished.

All these things go together - good news, peace, happiness, salvation and finally the reason for this - "Your God reigns". Peace and salvation and blessings are all a result of God being sovereign. Peace is a gift and God is the giver.

Isaiah goes on and describes some of the consequences of this peace and salvation given by God. Verse 8 'they sing for joy', they see God return to them with their own eyes. Verse 9, the waste places, the ruins and desolate places of Jerusalem (remember this was written in the exile period), will burst into joyful songs - the people left like ruins, broken apart and in need of rebuilding, will find joyfulness.

'For the Lord has comforted His people, he has redeemed Jerusalem' - God's peace is not the leave you alone type peace, but He actively comforts his people.

Finally, verse 10 tells us that 'God will bare His holy arm' - that is, that He uses it. Arms are bared by action - we today roll up our sleeves when we're doing some tasks, when we're getting our hands dirty so to speak. God doesn't have His arms folded. His arms of holiness work in all the nations , and all the ends of the earth will see His salvation.

## **Luke 1:67-79**

*And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,*

*68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people  
69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
71 that we should be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,*

*might serve him without fear,  
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
in the forgiveness of their sins,  
78 because of the tender mercy of our God,  
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high  
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

Luke's record of Zechariah's prophecy tells us more about this peace that comes from God - similar to what we read in Isaiah, these concepts of peace, salvation, redemption, are all tied together.

Zechariah is making plain reference to Jesus - the son of David. He's probably referencing Psalm 132, a messianic Psalm that tells of the son of David that will be the messiah, the Christ. Verse 17 of Psalm 132:

*17 There I will make a horn to sprout for David;  
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.*

Zechariah sees in the prophecies of old such as this Psalm, that God will deliver His people from their enemies, and receive mercy and remember the covenant they have with God.

Mention is made of the oath to Abraham - the covenant that God established with him to bless him and through him, through his descendants, bless all the nations of the world. Remember what the New Testament says about this - we, in Christ, are those descendants of Abraham that are blessed. Galatians 3:6-9:

*Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness,’ so then, those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’*

Then verse 74 and 75 - what is the consequence of Christ's coming? That we might serve God without fear and remain in holiness and righteousness all our days. Peace of the most perfect kind - not just free of worry and fear, but made righteous and holy, able to love and be loved with God. We can think of serving God easily enough - but to do so without fear implies a relationship of proper Shalom peace - no possibility any longer of conflict.

The second part of Zechariah's prophecy, starting verse 76 addresses the newborn John the baptist. He will be a prophet, he will go before Christ Jesus to prepare and to spread the good news of Christ's coming, to tell people about forgiveness of sin and the mercy of God. In this way, it will be as if the sun is rising and casting light on the whole earth, as Christ comes. One of those advent/Christmas passages that always crop up at this time of year is Isaiah 9. Verse 2:

*The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.*

Finally, we return to the theme of peace and see that this light is given 'to guide our feet into the path of peace'. Christ's coming leads us into the peaceful path, the direction of peace. Peace is something then that we walk in, that we participate in.

## **Aspects of peace**

There are several aspects to the peace that God brings through Christ.

### **Peace with God**

Romans 5:1:

*Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Peace with God - the hostility that is brought about by sin is dealt with in Christ.

Now the hostility to deal with goes both ways - first, sinners are hostile to God. We're all born with the inclination to turn from God, to go our own way, to reject the right authority of our creator. Romans 1 tells us all about it:

*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him ... Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ... they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator ...*

In our sin, we are hostile to God. We sometimes think that we can sin in ways that don't hurt others, or in ways that only affect ourselves. But in all sin, even the hypothetical sin that doesn't affect anyone else on earth (probably not possible), there is an injured party - God. All sin is rebellion against our creator.

What's the consequence of this? The hostility is rightly returned - Romans 1 also tells us about the consequence:

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...*

We cannot escape the consequences of sin - God's righteous, just, anger against sin must be satisfied. Of course we all know the answer to this - Christ and the cross. Romans 5 again:

*6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*

We have peace with God, that is cessation of all hostilities, through Christ. Even more, we know that we are welcomed into the family of God. Galatians 4:

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."*

So more than a ceasefire, more than an armistice, hostility is so removed, love and trust so gained, that we can call ourselves co-heirs with Christ. This is the sort of perfect peace that passes all understanding that we can read about in scripture.

## Peace with each other

Next, we are given peace with each other. In Christ, we are all united into one family and those things that divide us are broken down. Ephesians 2, talking to the gentile believers in Ephesus, showing that Jew and gentile are alike one in Christ:

*13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

Remember when we looked at Galatians and at the end of chapter 5 we have the fruit of the spirit contrasted with the works of the flesh. The lists given have a focus on things that either divide people - jealousy, anger, rivalries - or that bring them together - love, peace, patience, kindness. As we are given the sanctifying help of the Holy Spirit, we are made into people that can actually get along.

We all have those that we struggle to get along with - but in eternity we can look forward to the consummation of the Spirit's sanctifying work, which might look like a people that can't help but get along wonderfully.

## Ultimate, cosmic, eternal peace



Another aspect of the peace that comes through the work of Christ is a sort of ultimate peace. We look forward to a day when there is no more hostility, no more fear. When all is made new and perfect and we spend eternity with God enjoying Him and glorifying Him.

Colossians 1:19-20:

*19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

Paul tells us in Colossians that Christ will reconcile to Himself all things - that all will be at peace with God in the end. Now this isn't to deny the reality of hell, but it is to say that the pattern of things will be one of reconciliation. The fallen world will be resurrected into new perfection, not just the people, but everything. Peace will be the order of the day.

## **Conclusion**

True peace is possible. Peace of the sort that is not merely the absence of conflict or anxiety, but the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. In Him, we have peace with God, peace with each other, and look forward to an eternity of peace.

God's peace is a peace that is not fleeting or fragile like the earthly peace we so often experience. God's peace is grounded in His sovereignty and power and we are invited to walk in it, live it, share it and enjoy it forever.

2 Thessalonians 3:16:

*16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.*