

Peace in Jesus

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Introduction.

- A. It's fair to say that just about any teacher learns more from the material he prepares than his students do, and I certainly have found that to be true in my time as a preacher. As I've been working my way through these Sunday morning lessons on the fruit of the Spirit, I've been seeing a pattern emerge unexpectedly. Sometimes, we assume that the big differences between us and other religious folks are doctrinal. We practice baptism for the remission of sins, we worship God without musical instruments, and so on. However, it's becoming apparent to me that our philosophical differences are just as great. When we talk about love, we mean something else by it than people out in the world do, even religious people. When we talk about joy, we also have an understanding of it that those who don't study the word don't share either.
- B. This pattern continues as we look at peace. If we mention peace to some guy on the street, the first thing that's going to pop into his head is the beauty-pageant contestant who smiles and tells the world that she wants world peace. Even in the denominational world, people tend to identify the peace of the Bible with the end of conflict between nations. There's always some famous religious muckety-muck who's touring the Middle East, trying to persuade the people there to leave off their treasured pastime of blowing each other up.
- C. Now, certainly, there's nothing wrong with trying to convince people not to kill each other, although I tend to suspect it's a lost cause. However, that kind of peace on earth has absolutely nothing to do with the peace of the Bible. God's word is concerned not with ending the conflict between man and man, but with ending the conflict between man and God. Biblical peace is not the result of a treaty or a ceasefire, but of our reconciliation with God and the contentment that we find in Him. As with all virtues, this finds its highest expression in our Lord, so we can rightly turn our attention to learning about peace in Jesus.

I. What Peace Isn't.

- A. Before we explore the foundation of this peace in Christ, though, we need to learn where it isn't found. For some reason, people tend to be convinced that Jesus was a wimp, and so Christians have to be wimps. That's a ridiculous idea. I guarantee you that if we told the Pharisees or any of the other opponents of Jesus that He was a wimp, they would have laughed at the thought. Yes, Jesus was loving. Yes, Jesus was gentle, but He never backed down from a fight that was worth fighting. His peace is **NOT AVOIDING CONFLICT**.
- B. We see this quite plainly in His words in Matthew 10:34-36. He tells us, in fact, that if we listen to Him, He may well set us at odds with our own family members, let alone the rest of the world around us. In fact, if we go through life as supposed "Christians" without ever getting in a conflict with anybody, that's a sign that we're doing something wrong. In true Christianity, there can never be any kind of compromise with the world on righteousness, and that's the kind of attitude that drives the world bonkers. The evil men of Jesus' day absolutely hated Him because He stood for the truth and wouldn't shut up, and if we do the same, they will hate us too. We're not here to be thought well of by the wicked. We're here to teach and obey the truth, regardless of the personal consequences, regardless of the conflict it creates. That's following Jesus.
- C. Similarly, we see that the peace of Jesus included **NOT TOLERATING EVIL**. Jesus was never one to make a scene on His own account, but when it came to defending God, He was willing to make as much noise as it took. We see this quite clearly in His cleansing of the temple, described in Matthew 21:12-13. Let's spend a moment picturing just what is going on here: Jesus is going through all these merchants in the temple like a one-man wrecking crew. He's throwing tables around, He's kicking money jars over, and he's chasing people and animals around with a whip. Folks, if we did something like that today, we'd get arrested!
- D. That doesn't fit in with our mental images of "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," but it is something we need to pay attention to. If we want to be disciples of Jesus, when we are confronted with evil, we need to take a stand against it. When one of our co-workers comes in cussing like a sailor, it's not our place to quietly endure it. It's our place to ask him not to talk like that in our presence. Now, I'm not going to lie to you and pretend like we'll start winning popularity contests if we live like that, 'cause we won't. But friends, God has never yet been pleased by someone who only did what was popular. Let's take a stand and refuse to tolerate evil.

II. Personal Peace.

- A. Now that we know what the peace of Jesus isn't, we can look at how He found peace for Himself on a personal level. One of the main ways that Jesus captured this peace was by **PRAYING**. We see this in the sequence of events described in Mark 6:31-32, 46. Today, we might say that this was a time in which Jesus and His disciples were just stressed out. People kept on bothering them, they never had a moment to themselves, and even when they went to a secluded place, the multitudes just followed them. So, when Jesus finally had a

chance to relax, what did He do? Make a snack? Read a book? Flip on the TV to catch the latest episode of CSI? No; He caught up with His Father instead by going to the mountain to pray.

- B. How often do we do that? Goodness knows that just about all of us have all kinds of stress in our lives, but how often do we try to re-center ourselves by doing everything BUT praying? The thing is, none of those other stress relievers work. They might make us forget about our problems for a little while, but the problems are still there. By contrast, though, when we take the time to re-connect with God, we can get rid of our problems by casting our care upon Him. Let's remember that. Let's find peace through prayer.
- C. In a similar way, Jesus also found peace by **TRUSTING GOD**. This is perhaps most evident in the story of Jesus stilling the storm, which comes to its conclusion in Mark 4:38-40. There are actually two ways that we see trust revealed in this account. The first one is obvious in the Scripture we just read. Jesus trusted that God would answer Him when He asked for help. The second, less conspicuous way appears just a few verses earlier, when the Scripture describes Jesus, in the midst of this dreadful storm, asleep on a stern cushion. He was able to sleep because He knew that no matter what happened, God would see Him through it.
- D. We can learn from both of these things. We need to find peace in the power of prayer, in the knowledge that God will hear us in all things according to His will. If we don't pray with that faith, our prayer lives will never get anywhere. Second, though, we need to believe that God will get us safely through the storms of our lives. If we are in Christ, no matter how dark and threatening things appear, God is watching over us and will protect us. Even if we die, God will raise us from the dead and bring us home to Him, and we can find peace in that.
- E. Jesus also discovered personal peace in **RESISTING TEMPTATION**. Look, for instance, at the end of the account of the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:10-11. When it became clear that He wasn't going to give in, the devil left Him alone. That's something we need to understand too. Sometimes, we let the devil nag us into sin. He tempts us and tempts us and tempts us until finally we give in to get relief from the temptation.
- F. If we really want the devil to leave us alone, that won't cut it. Once Satan gets us doing what he wants, he doesn't go away. He closes in for the kill, and there is no peace in being consumed by sin. The Bible tells us plainly that he will only flee from us if we resist him first. Once we make a habit of saying no to a particular temptation, the devil is going to get the message and leave us alone. Of course, he'll be back eventually with some new scheme to get us, but resisting him strongly is the only way we can hope to get peace from him.
- G. Likewise, we see peace evident in Christ in **FORGIVING OTHERS**. Of course, this is apparent in His plea from the cross that God forgive those who were crucifying Him, but we see a little more of His reasoning in His earlier words in Mark 11:25-26. There are really two kinds of peace at issue here. In the first place, Jesus makes clear that if we aren't willing to forgive others, God isn't willing to forgive us. Only as we have a forgiving spirit can we be reconciled to Him. Second, though, forgiving others is the only way to have peace within ourselves. Ever held a grudge against somebody? I have. I thought they'd done me wrong, and I was so bitter about it that I stayed angry with them for years, and my anger poisoned everything else in my life. I was so unforgiving that it made me miserable. I don't think that's a unique experience. I think everyone who refuses to forgive has to deal with the same problem. Let's be wise and find peace in forgiveness.

III. Making Peace.

- A. Jesus, though, wasn't just concerned about personal peace. He wanted to make peace between God and others too, and the first way we see Him doing this is by **CALLING SINNERS**. Look at His words and actions in Luke 5:31-32. Let's pause a moment to appreciate what Jesus is doing here. The people this passage calls "sinners" were irreligious Jews. These were people who shared in God's covenant with Israel, but had chosen to turn their backs on righteousness. The Pharisees of Jesus' day thought it was a sin to sit down and eat with people like that. Jesus disagreed. He ate with sinners not to endorse their evil lives, but because it gave Him the opportunity to persuade them to repent and return. Friends, we need to be like Jesus in this and have a heart that loves the soul of the sinner. We need to be willing to sit down and eat with them, both literally and metaphorically. This does not mean that we should act like nothing's wrong. It does mean, though, that we should seize every chance we have to make peace between the sinner and God by calling him to repentance.
- B. Finally, we need to be like Jesus in making peace by being willing to give our lives in **RECONCILING OTHERS**. Look at how Paul describes the peace that Jesus made on the cross in Ephesians 2:14-16. Through the sacrifice of His body, He abolished the Law that divided Jew from Gentile and man from God and united them all to each other, thus creating the peace that we see in the church today. Clearly, this is not something in which we are going to exactly imitate Jesus. For one thing, that's a battle that has already been fought.
- C. Nonetheless, we also need to invest our lives in being peacemakers. As Jesus says in Matthew 5, peacemakers are blessed and fit to be described as the sons of God. In hindsight, we can see why: we show ourselves to be God's children as we follow in the peacemaking footsteps of Him who was God's Son. This has to be one of the most important goals of our lives as Christians. We should always be on the lookout for ways to bring sinners back to God. We need to understand how precarious the fate of the sinner is, and we need to be willing to do whatever it takes to rescue him and reconcile him to the God who loves him.

Conclusion. If you're a sinner and you need to make peace with God, seek that reconciliation today.