

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Things to Think About on Your Way to Church

Psalm 122

We are going to Meet the God who Gives Us Peace

[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Introduction

In September 1938 Neville Chamberlain, who was then the Prime Minister, returned from Germany having obtained the Anglo-German Declaration, signed by both him and Adolf Hitler. Neville Chamberlain used the phrase 'peace for our time' in his speech outside of Downing Street. Whether Chamberlain believed this would be the case or whether he was buying time before war really started is not known. But the 'peace for our time' was short lived. World War II began, following Germany's invasion of Poland, less than a year after Chamberlain's statement. One of the most devastating wars in the history of the world was then waged over a six-year period, involving nearly all of the world's countries.

Since the end of World War II, in September 1945, a period of non-conflict has occurred which is referred to as the 'Long Peace.' However, it has been argued that although major powers have not been fighting each other in quite the same way since then, the number of days of actual peace in the world is very limited, possibly to a handful of days. Over the last 3000 years or so, the percentage of time spent in peace is only in single figures, notwithstanding any conflicts that were not captured in historical records. We have seen over the last few years that this trend is not improving, with a number of significant wars starting recently that have impacted our everyday lives. It seems that peace in the world, although eagerly sought after, is very hard to obtain.

Yet our passage today stands out in contrast to this backdrop of a world continually fighting against itself. Our title today is 'We are going to meet the God who gives us peace.' In the light of what I have been talking about, this could be construed as mindless optimism, a blindness to reality or simply a naivety of grandiose proportions. Can the Christian really speak of God giving us peace when we observe the world that we live in? The suffering that we see all around us has often been put forward as an argument against the existence of God! Yet any Christian you would speak to would have the conviction that we can enjoy peace, and that God has freely given it. Like many misconceptions about Christianity, it is simply a problem with perspectives. I therefore trust that as we go through this topic we will see that God does indeed not only give peace, but gives a peace well beyond any that has ever been achieved in this world – a true peace that can make the heart joyful and glad and should stir us up to worship God more when we consider how He has brought it about.

The Psalms of Ascents

This series, called the Psalms of Ascents, is looking at the different topics found in Psalms 120-134. These Psalms would have been sung as the people of Israel made their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. Although the focus is different for Christians, the principle of what the Lord offers is the same. Psalm 122 is the Psalm that has triggered our consideration of peace.

Peace – What the Bible Means

Before looking at the Psalm itself, I will go back to something I mentioned earlier, that perspective is important when taking up this subject of peace. The Bible speaks about peace often – a quick Bible search for the word shows the word occurs over 400 times. It also appears in nearly every book of the New Testament. Naturally, the word is not always used in relation to God. Several instances include the idea of peace between people, nations, and families.

The key consideration of peace in the Bible, however, is the meaning which includes God. When considering God, it is not saying God gives us peace in this world. It is talking about the harmonised relationship between God and a person, accomplished through the Gospel. This is therefore the key point and perspective we should have when considering peace in relation to God. The peace offered in the Bible and our position before God. We have peace only if we have dealt with the issue of sin which has removed peace between God and each person.

When considering this topic, we should be very clear about the unrighteousness of mankind. The opposite of peace is war, and in effect, this is the condition of every person who has ever lived. Our unrighteousness, inherited from our first parents, has meant that a relationship with God is unattainable. There is no mitigation nor negotiation – God will have nothing to do with unrighteousness and is hostile towards us in that regard. The result is separation from God and the certainty of judgement. Coupled to this is the fact that there is nothing we can do of ourselves to change that situation.

But thanks be to God that we have sections of the Bible such as Ephesians 2 – the Gospel is indeed good news! Through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, God has provided the solution despite the fact that we caused the problem in the first place. The penalty for unrighteousness has been paid in full and the relationship between God and man has been restored for all those who believe. In so doing we are brought into a peaceful relationship with God. This is therefore what we talk about when we consider peace in the Bible, and it is important to be reminded of this perspective. In any circumstance we are in, that peace with God cannot be taken away from us, which is a reassuring and wonderful thought.

God's Peace

When we go into a bit more detail about this peace that we can have with God, we find how it is described in association with God in the Bible. When looking through the instances where peace and God come together, we find four short phrases:

- The God of Peace
- The Peace of God
- Peace with God
- Peace from God.

Each one of these brings out a different aspect concerning peace and God. We shall take each one in turn.

1. The God of Peace

We start with 'the God of Peace' – There are a number of occurrences of this phrase in the letters of Paul, usually occurring towards the end of a letter. An example is Romans 16, Verse 20:

And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

1 Thessalonians 5, verse 23 is another:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The Peace of God

The phrase 'the God of peace' should serve as a reminder to us that God is indeed God of everything, including peace. Peace isn't something we have made up and hope that God will go along with. Peace is something that God has founded and is part of who He is as well. Everything that we come across in this world in terms of our abilities, emotions, structures are all from God and not the other way around. As God is the God of Peace, we can be sure then that His version is the best kind of peace that can be obtained.

There is also the aspect to consider that God is at peace in Himself. Many so-called gods were war creatures. Battles litter mythology, both past and present. This is not the impression we should have with the true and living God. He is at peace, He is in control, He has a clear plan, and He is never caught off guard.

Coupled with this, we see in the two verses that we have read that God is also prepared and willing to take the necessary action required to maintain this peace for those that have sought it from Him. We see that enemies of this peace are to be crushed and removed. We see that what we require is provided so that we can enjoy the peace of God completely, rather than things getting in the way because we cannot deal with them ourselves. From this it is clear that, rather than blaming God for the failures of this world, we can rejoice in the fact that God offers and works for a peace that is available to all.

3. Peace with God

The next phrase is 'the peace of God.' One reference I have found for this phrase is in Philippians 4 verses 6 & 7:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

I could be accused of reading too much into this, especially as it is simply the reverse order for the previous, but I can't help feeling that if the first phrase is reminding us of the supremacy of God, in that He is God of everything, this second points more towards His willingness to offer it to us. If we take another feature of God that we enjoy – righteousness – it helps to make the point. When we read of the righteousness of God it often is considering how righteousness is imputed, or assigned, to us. Nobody would question the righteousness of God, but the Bible tells us it can be given to us. I would suggest the same is implied here. Love, holiness, goodness – these are other examples of the best aspects of God that He is looking to share with us. How thankful we can be that God is also willing to share His peace with us as well.

'Peace with God' is the third on our list and remarkably only occurs once as far I as I could find. This occurrence is in the book of Romans. Chapter 5 verses 1 & 2 read:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

In these verses we have been given one of those nice and concise gospel messages. The first phrase gave us the nature of God's peace, the second gave us the fact that He is willing to share

it. Now we have something of what we have. These are incredible truths! We are justified by faith, which is important, both in terms of a link back to that requirement throughout the Bible which is the need for faith in God. There is no other way to be saved except through faith in the salvation offered from God, and this has been, and will always be, the case. Justification means that we are able to stand before God without the fear of sin getting in the way. Everything has been sorted out and made right. It is not letting us off – the debt has been paid and the sentence passed to another. As a result, we have peace with God, and how thankful we should be! It is not grudging acceptance or a pausing of hostilities. It is not an unstable deal to avoid further difficulties or ruin. It is absolute peace.

The verses go on to give a little bit of information on the access that we have to God which was not possible before. It also gives us that future hope that we look forward to. If we were to compare this with peace in the world, we will quickly see that the two are completely at variance with each other. Peace in this world means that we can leave each other alone and go on comfortably where we were before. Peace with God means we look forward to leaving this scene here to be in the presence of God and to enjoy everything He will provide us with!

We then have the Guarantor of this peace in the mention of the Lord Jesus Christ. That point in history when the Lord Jesus gave His life for us means that salvation was provided and all that was necessary to deal with our sin has been accomplished. We know that in rising from the dead His work was confirmed as complete, and one day, all will be made to acknowledge His name. But in these verses, we see a wonderful connection to the peace we have with God. The fact that we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ should thrill us because it is through Him that our peace has not only been provided but also kept. As long as the Lord Jesus is there in heaven, our peace is secure. We know that the Lord Jesus is alive for evermore. Revelation tells us He is the First and the Last. Therefore, our peace with God is eternally secure!

4. Peace from God

The fourth phrase 'Peace from God' is found in nearly every greeting in the New Testament letters. A couple of examples are given below:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ
(Galatians 1 v. 3).

To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God
our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Timothy 1 v. 2).

Again, the nuances of the words may not seem much but there appears to be something of a reminder here to the readers. The first point to make here is that the Apostle Paul is not suggesting that we somehow need more grace and peace from God. These are all things we already have. It is as if the Apostle wants to start out with these statements as a highlight so that as he writes these letters we should all have in mind what God has provided and offered to all those who believe. All the considerations of the letters that were to be unfolded are as a result of the grace, mercy, and peace that we have with God. If there is correction, encouragement, teaching, building up, etc., they are all based on what we have been freely given by God. Peace is a part of that which God offers. We should not forget it, knowing what a wonderful position we have with God as a result of His love for us and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Kingdom of God includes Peace in the Holy Spirit

Having gone through these four phrases there is one more scripture that I would like to quote which is some encouragement from Romans 14 verses 16-18:

Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of
God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in

the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

I am encouraged by this passage because we learn that the Kingdom of God, which we know will last forever, is peace. It doesn't include peace or have a level of peace – it is peace! As well as being able to look forward to this in the future in all its fullness, there is a real practical outpouring of it now. As believers walking in love with the Lord Jesus, we are able to overcome so many barriers that disrupt any peace from this world, with very little effort. How good it is to have fellowship with believers all over the world. The barriers of race, nationality, biological sex, age, background, education, and many other things, that would naturally cause division are cast aside. The common ground of belief in the Lord Jesus and the saving grace He showed by giving Himself for us enables us to focus on a far greater connection than any differences that exist between us. In this we have a practical visible reality to the peace that only God can offer.

What we learn from Psalm 122

I have spent quite some time looking at the nature of the peace that we can enjoy when we know God and the salvation of the Lord Jesus. But I feel it would be remiss not to spend a bit of time also looking at Psalm 122 to consider if it can give us any further help in understanding why we can speak and sing of the peace of God as we 'go to church.' I have four points from this Psalm which are particularly relevant to our consideration of God's peace today. It is only nine verses so we will just read through it now – Psalm 122:

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD." Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. For thrones are set there for judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces." For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace be within you." Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good.

The Author

He first point is in the initial title information, and it is concerning the fact that King David penned it. If we think of what we know about David, peace is not the first thing that comes to mind. God said of David that he was a man of blood. The life of David was one of trial, war, difficulty, and some terrible sins. Emotionally, David was rarely at peace it seems. Many Psalms written by David talk of the inner problems he was having. Yet he is able to write a Psalm requesting for peace from God. There are probably few circumstances where you could not find empathy from David's life for the difficulties you face today, yet David had confidence in God's peace. How encouraging that one such as David could write with such confidence and assurance, about the peace that God is able to provide.

Location

Psalm 122 talks about peace being within the compact community of Jerusalem which was a city surrounded by walls. The notion here is that there is safety provided by the strong provision of the city. There would have been a sense of security from this in the past. We do not have a city or fortress to flee to in our Christian walk today. But our ally is God, our strength is from God. We do not need city walls when the Creator of the universe is dwelling within us. We have a wonderful reminder of the strength and security offered to us that maintains our peace, which only God can provide.

Attitude

There is a statement of gladness and a sense of eagerness to be in Jerusalem, near the temple where God dwelt. I mentioned earlier that the peace with God is very different because it looks forward to a time when we will be with the One we have peace with. We can enjoy some of that now as we spend time in worship and praise to God with other believers in church. The challenge is: Do we have that sense of eagerness and gladness that we can do so as David had? Our world tries to take our attention to many other things but so often they do not give us peace but cause us to be disappointed and always needing more. We can only find true peace spending time with God and sharing time with God's people.

Remembrance

In Psalm 122 we get some remembrances of former times Israelites had experienced there in Jerusalem and in the temple. Their feet had stood in the gates before. The Old Testament is full of reminders of the times when God had helped Israel in difficult times before. How much our understanding of peace with God can be strengthened when we recall His faithfulness to us in the past.

Conclusion

Peace is a popular topic in the world today. As we have considered Psalm 122 and the subject of peace, I trust that we can more clearly see that the peace which the Bible speaks about is better than what this world has to offer. It also provides us with that protection and strength when we have hard decisions we must make, when there is trouble in the world around us, or with the internal struggles we may have and the sorrows we face in life. We are not immune from the world's trials, but we have something that is immune to anything we face in this world. May we be encouraged to rejoice and give thanks for the peace that we have with God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on 'Psalm 122: We are going to Meet the God who Gives Us Peace', talk number T1454 in the series 'Things to Think About on Your Way to Church.'

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