

HE IS OUR PEACE

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Clearly, we live in troubled times. From Darfur to Wall Street, things are shaking! The news is not encouraging. Wages increase, but the rising cost of living eats it up. Job insecurity is on the rise. Wars continue to rage the world over. Disease ravages the lives of so many. Natural disasters seem more frequent and more devastating. National security measures are greater than ever before, yet we feel less secure than ever. No wonder Jesus characterized the feelings of the last days like this: "People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth."

What is the answer? The answer is Jesus.

In spite of the current economic tailspin, peoples' appetite for more is unabated. Advertisers continue to bait us with images and sound bites of all that we "lack" that will immeasurably improve our lives. We have so much, yet are certain that there is something still missing. Still, our wardrobes and accessories and autos and gadgets and sightseeing do not satisfy us.

Where can we find rest? The answer is still Jesus.

MSG Psalm 4:6-8 *Why is everyone hungry for more? "More, more," they say. "More, more." I have God's more-than-enough, more joy in one ordinary day than they get in all their shopping sprees. At day's end I'm ready for sound sleep, for you, God, have put my life back together.*

A more literal translation renders the last verse this way:

NKJV Psalm 4:8 *I will both lie down in peace, and sleep;
For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.*

Rest *and* safety and a good night's sleep come from the Lord alone.

The Hebrew word translated "peace" is *shalom*. It is a useful word. If you can say, "Shalom," you can get along pretty well in Israel, because it is used to convey "Hello" and "Goodbye." Pastor Dan Betzer assures me it will also do for "Do you want a hamburger?" or "How's your sister?"

It is a comprehensive term, expressing the positive presence of harmony, wholeness, soundness, well-being, and success in the areas of life that really matter.

Shalom expresses tranquility in the world, in terms of international relationships.

Never in our lifetimes has there been a single day of worldwide peace (Jesus' prediction of wars and rumors of war was accurate). When the antichrist arises to power, he will institute international peace, but it will last only a few years. However, when Jesus returns the whole world will enjoy perpetual rest from war, everlasting international peace.

Within a nation, *shalom* conveys a settled feeling when times are good and calm, as it seemed in the 1950s, when World War II had ended, and the Cold War was still only lukewarm.

In human relationships, *shalom* describes wholeness and harmony.

On the individual level, *shalom* expresses a personal sense of wellness (as the hymnwriter put it: “It is well with my soul”).

When God created the world, He was blessed by the works of His hands:

NLT Genesis 1:31 *Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!*

Drawing from another hymn, there was “Peace, peace, wonderful peace, coming down from the Father above.”

What happened to that original peace? There was a conference in the Garden between a serpent and a woman and a man, and everything changed. It’s not a good idea to hold a meeting without inviting God’s presence!

Adam’s and Eve’s decisions to act independently of God shattered the peace. Could this explain a lack of peace in your own life? Sin will drive out peace every time.

In the first three chapters of Genesis there were no hurricanes, no earthquakes, no floods. But since then, there has been no end of trouble upon the earth and among humankind.

Just like we do today, ancient people tried all they could imagine to stem the tide of unrest, but as soon as they managed to quiet things down in one area, trouble erupted somewhere else.

There finally came a ray of hope in the prophecies of the Hebrew people. God announced the coming of a Messiah, and this Messiah was identified as a Wonderful Counselor and the Prince of Peace.

NLT Isaiah 9:6 *For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Messiah’s peace begins in the individual heart. He didn’t arrive with legions of soldiers or a staff of advisors, to enforce His peace on the world. Instead, He comes to us all, one by one, to reveal his grace and invite our faith.

Messiah accomplished our peace by sacrificing Himself on our behalf:

NKJV Isaiah 53:5 *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

As a result of His loving sacrifice, we have peace with God; He is no longer at odds with us, He is no longer against us. God is forever for us; His favor is ours through Jesus Christ.

NLT Romans 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.*

And He also brings a new peace to our interpersonal relationships:

MSG Romans 3:21 *But in our time something new has been added. What Moses and the prophets witnessed to all those years has happened. ²² The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in him. ²³ For there is no difference between us and them in this. Since we’ve compiled this long and sorry re-*

cord as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us.²⁴ Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift.²⁵ He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.

Oswald Chambers reminds us that "the coming of Jesus Christ is not a peaceful thing; it is a disturbing thing. The coming of Jesus Christ to the natural man means the destruction of all peace that is not based on a personal relationship to Himself."

Jesus warned:

Matthew 10:34 "Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword.³⁵ 'I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.'³⁶ Your enemies will be right in your own household!"

It was not Jesus' purpose to divide, but He knew it would be an initial effect, for people do not all respond to Him in the same way or at the same time. Not everyone has faith.

"All peace that is not based on a personal relationship to [Jesus]" is temporal, short-lived, and superficial. The peace that Jesus brings is greater than *all* the world's troubles.

NLT John 16:33 "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

The Prince of Peace Himself is undisturbed in every circumstance. In other words, the peace Jesus offers is *His own* peace.

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Oswald Chambers wondered, "What kind of peace had Jesus Christ? A peace that kept Him for thirty years at home with brothers and sisters who did not believe in Him; a peace that kept Him through three years of popularity, hatred, and scandal; and He says, 'My peace I give unto you'; 'let not your heart be troubled,' i.e., see that your heart does not get disturbed out of its relationship to Me."

Many people exhibit signs of burnout these days. The pace of life, the pressures of life, the complexity of life, the challenges of life threaten to exhaust our shallow resources. And, why are our resources so shallow? Because we are not deep with Jesus. We do not spend time with Him to deepen that relationship.

When the pressure is on, we wonder, "How can I take care of all the things in my life if I take more time *away* from those things to be with Jesus?" Someone has blinded our minds to the fact that Jesus can take care of those things *better* than we can.

Chambers also wrote, "There is one unmistakable witness that Jesus promised us, and that is the gift of His peace. 'My peace I give unto you.' No matter how complicated the circumstances may be, one moment of contact with Jesus and the fuss is gone, the panic is gone, all the shallow emptiness is gone, and His peace is put in, absolute tranquility, because of what He says—'All power is given unto Me.'"

Jesus, the Messiah, the Risen Lord, the Living God, can do what He has promised. *His* peace is assured, for He Himself is our peace. This peace is not a “thing” or a “program” — it is Jesus, come to dwell with us.

Ephesians 2:14 *Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.*

Now, whether Jew or Gentile, black or white, male or female, and regardless of the background or condition of your life, if you have entrusted your life to the leadership and care of Jesus Christ, His peace unites us. We are one new race of people — we are *Christ's* people.

In the First Covenant, God revealed Himself as *Yahweh Shalom*, God of Peace. He is our peace.

Do you know Him? As your Savior? As your Prince of Peace?

This weekend, during an exercise in our Prayer Workshop, I was impressed by this verse from Paul:

Ephesians 2:8 *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.*

“God saved you... when you believed.”

I know that Jesus paid the price for my salvation 2,000 years ago when He died on the cross. I know that He won the victory when He rose from the dead. I know that He received the glory when He ascended to the Father. But when did He *save me*?

He saved me when I believed, on September 18, 1972. The day I renounced my contentious arguments against God and gave up trying to craft a salvation story of my own.

Notice, Paul did not write that you were saved when you came to church. Not, when you read the Bible. Not, when you prayed. But, *when you believed*.

Have you believed? Or, have you held to a substitute — some religious idea or behavior — as the key to your salvation?

Have you trusted Jesus Christ to forgive you and to save you and to bring you back into God's loving fellowship?

He, and He alone, is your real peace.

I leave you with this benediction:

2 Thessalonians 3:16 *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you his peace at all times and in every situation. The Lord be with you all.*