

Peace

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[0 : 0 0] Evening everyone. We're going to be, as Derek said, spending a bit of time just now thinking about one of the fruit of the Spirit. So for if you're visiting the congregation, I've been looking at this theme, this text over the last little while. We're slightly out of kilter and then we're going to be looking at peace tonight, although it's the last of our studies. So in Galatians we read about the fruit of the Spirit. We read, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there's no law and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. So peace is what we're going to be talking about tonight. How's your week looking? I wonder how you feel as you think about the next few days, the week, the relationships you have and all that you've got going on.

You may have 13 urgent diary entries that you have to deal with by Tuesday and it brings you out in a cold sweat even to think about it. You may have relational problems. You may have a very unsympathetic boss you just cannot speak to. And you may have a lingering pain in the back of your head that's been causing you for trouble for some time. And you feel no peace. How do we get peace? What does peace even look like and what is the peace that is being spoken of in this passage? So if peace, particularly the biblical peace that's being spoken of here is the opposite of anxiety, which is partly what we've been looking at so often. There was a conference and there's another conference next week.

What is the peace that is spoken of here and how do we get it? I want to look at two main things. So first of all, what we're going to do is we're going to look at some ways in which it's suggested to us that we may get peace in general terms, if you like, in kind of out there. What are the ideas out there that you may receive where people will say, well, this is how you could get some peace in your life. And the way that I want to kind of bracket this is to say, I think many people understand peace as something primarily attained and then experienced. So we go get it and then we can enjoy it. But it's up to us. So a few things just to do with this. The first thing is I Googled how do I get peace. It was moderately helpful, probably not very helpful at all. Most of the things that came up initially to do with that search and particularly another search I did to do with quotes about peace, most of them told me to look at me. I was the answer to my need for peace. Give you a couple of examples. Marvin Gaye, believe it or not, says if you cannot find peace within yourself, you'll never find it anywhere. And the woman called Elizabeth Gilbert, she wrote a book called Eat, Pray, Love. She said this, we don't realize that somewhere within us all there does exist a supreme self who is eternally at peace. Now that carries the idea a wee bit further, brings in some kind of eastern ideas. But the point is this, you, you want peace? Well, you need to give it to yourself or you need to find it for yourself. Now there's a lot in all of these things. We could spend a long time talking about them all, but we don't have a long time. So second thing I want to mention, just in this kind of bracket of peace being something that we achieve or attain and then experience and enjoy, the second suggestion is change your circumstances.

Your circumstances make you uneasy, fretful, they take away your peace, change them, go somewhere. That's a lot of, the kind of ideas that you'll see if you look into this, go somewhere and look within. It made me think of a book I had to read, kind of a book I had to read when I was at uni and it's this piece that's called Walden by a man called Henry David Thoreau. Not an easy read, but what this man does is he, in his life, partly for the search for peace, uproots. And he goes and lives in a very idyllic setting.

And he lives in harmony with nature. He infuses into his kind of processing everything, some of the mystical ideas that were being mentioned just a minute ago. And there he says, in the forest, with the bees and the lake, is peace. So that's another idea. In many ways, in many ways, he is the original environmental ethicist. There's so many nowadays withhold that, attaining that lifestyle as the gateway to peace. Look at what we've done with the world. How are we going to make it right? Come back into harmony with the world and then we will attain a measure of peace. So for him it was all about living one with himself and the one with nature. Go somewhere, get out of your rubble, get out of your rubble, get out of your rubble circumstances. All will be well. Third thing, final thing in this kind of bracket that I'm talking about, eliminate the dissenting voices. So you don't feel peace because lots of people are in your life who oppose you in different ways. They take away your peace.

[5 : 41] They disagree with you. They make you feel that your life choices aren't valid. A lot of people describe not always in very nice terms the generation that we live in nowadays as a snowflake generation. In other words, a generation of people who are incredibly precious about themselves because they've been taught all through their lives that self-expression and being exactly who they feel they should be is the paramount virtue that they should hold. And the thing with that is, as soon as people who may feel that way encounter a dissenting voice, anybody who would challenge them at work or at university campus, whatever, it's incredibly hard to handle that dissenting voice because if freedom of the self comes with self-discovery and self-expression and that is my validation, then for somebody to come and challenge me and tell me I'm wrong is catastrophic to who I am as a person. Maybe you feel something of that. I think a lot of people feel something of that. And so the answer, therefore, is to silence the people or to remove them from your life. You hear stories from time to time about certain groups being shut down on university campuses, sometimes arising from situations like this. So there's three things. There's lots more. And we could say a lot more about these things. I realize this is quite general. Look within, primarily.

Change your circumstances. And silence the bad voices. And very briefly, what's the problem with this? Because this doesn't help us attain lasting peace and it's not the kind of peace that is being spoken of in the passage here that we're going to go on and have a little bit of a look at in a minute. Well, to say that I will find peace for myself is really stressful. It's very burdensome for me to be solely responsible for my sense of peace.

Change my circumstances. Good. It can be great to change your circumstances. We all need a break sometimes. Sometimes a place you are in is an absolute nightmare. And for your good, you need to leave it. However, to say the ultimate source of peace is to constantly be changing circumstances so that conditions are always perfect. The problem with that is you still have to live with yourself. You're still dealing with yourself. You still got yourself as the ultimate source for your peace. Change of circumstances becomes the new normal.

And of course, the problem is we go somewhere. Usually, we just have to come home again after a while and things are the same as they always were. And to eliminate dissenting voices always, is that the answer? I think the problem with that in some ways is that actually fuels a level of intolerance within us. It actually makes us unable to live at peace with those who are different to us. So we literally can't tolerate the other. And I don't think that's the answer either. Now, I've said these are brief ways of looking at these subjects. But what I want to do is just now is move on to the biblical presentation of the kind of peace that is being spoken about here. And in contrast to thinking about peace as something that we have to first of all attain and then enjoy. I think this is what the Bible says about peace, that it is something attained for us and declared over us. So that's crucial distinction.

The peace that the Bible speaks of is something that is declared by God and then experienced by us. How so? Well, a final quote from my extensive Google search of peace quotes comes from a woman called Linda Evans, who I believe starred in Dynasty. So we're going back a few years, quite a lot of years. She said this, if there's no inner peace, people can't give it to you. The husband can't give it to you. Your children can't give it to you.

[10:00] You have to give it to yourself. I think she's partly right. I think to come to the point where you understand that looking for others to ultimately fulfill us is perceptive because for me to ask you, for you to ask me to fulfill you to the point where we're at peace is impossible.

But she then goes on, of course, to come back full circle to what we were looking at at the start, which is to say only you can give peace to yourself. Here's where we would say is the difference in biblical terms. Nobody can give peace to you but God. And that is the essential proclamation that the Bible makes to us. The only place that we can find the underlying peace that is spoken of in a letter like Galatians in Ephesians that we read and we're going to come back to is God himself, in Christ himself. And there's a rub for us. Maybe you yourself tonight hate hearing that because you don't want to have to be before God as somebody who says God, I lack peace in my life. You need to help me find it. And the other thing about that is that we hate the kind of peace that God asks us to consider that he will give us. Let's look at some of our texts. So I'm going to go through just a few different texts now. Here's the thing about God and why he is the only one who is able to attain and declare peace. He's the only one who can accurately discern our situation. Do I have the wisdom to discern every aspect of my life and to pronounce a verdict on what I need in every part of who I am? God is the only one who can accurately discern my situation, justly pronounce the verdict, powerfully rescue me and keep me safe. And I want to say that we see this first of all in Ephesians passage.

I don't know if these are going to come up on the screen. They may do. If they don't, I'm going to read them anyway. So in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1, here are some of the things that we hear biblically. This is what God would say to us that we need to see in first case. He says, you were dead. There's his verdict, incredibly uncomfortable. You weren't just needing a wee tweak. You were dead in your sins in which you once walked following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work. Verse 4, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive. He's literally saved us from death, spiritual death, and He will redeem the physical death that we face. He's made us alive. Can't do that for ourselves. That's a game changer for life.

Let me just go on a little bit in this wonderful, wonderful chapter. So we read in verse 13, but now, in Christ Jesus who makes all this possible, you who once were far off, alienated, we thought that that gives us a lack of peace, doesn't it? To feel like outsiders, to feel alone, to feel like we can't get something, we can't go to a place that we want to be.

He says, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Now you're speaking in the context of those who were outside the covenant of Gentiles being brought in because of the extent of the work of God in Jesus Christ, so that Jews and Gentiles become recipients of God's mercy. He himself is our peace. Jesus himself is the one that we go to for our peace. And then if I go down to verse 17, as we kind of scan through this chapter, he says this, and he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him, we both have access in one spirit to the Father, something we cannot do for ourselves, attain to God, to the presence of God, to come into the throne room of God, and to be seen as children and welcomed as children with all of the burdens that we face and the inabilities that we have and the sins that we carry. He says, I admit you and I love you because of what I have done for you. I want to look at John. How is this possible? We read about how Jesus is the one through whom we have access to this wonderful new relationship, this complete change of situation and circumstance. Let me read a few verses from John because I want you to see very clearly what Jesus very consciously did and said in this regard. Jesus spoke about peace. So in John chapter 14, Jesus says these words to his fearsome, fearful disciples as he's preparing to go to fulfill the work that he was called to do. Jesus said, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Do you see what he says there? I leave my peace with you. How so? How? The disciples had to go through all that happened to Jesus. They were fearful and quaking. But then he comes back, doesn't he? Then he comes back and he's resurrected and we read in John 20. What does he say to them when he appears to the disciples who are fearful, trembling, fearful of those who come and even further destroy their peace? In John 20 verse 19, on the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, peace be with you. How can he say that? Because of where he's just been. Because Jesus Christ just went to the place, went side place, the terrible place with no peace where he cried out, my God, why have you forsaken me? There is no peace for me here. And Jesus consciously and deliberately and with joy for what was set before him went to that place so that he could return and say to all his children, my peace I declare to you because I have purchased it for you.

[17 : 05] And so Jesus speaks very, very clearly about the peace. In Romans 5 we read, therefore, since we've been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

An old minister said this, William Still said, commenting on that verse in Romans chapter 5, and hear this, this is again a crucial distinction to keep in mind when we think about this, this is really just the starting point for our consideration of this. He said, though we have peace with God of Romans 5, means that God is at peace with us. In the first instance, peace is not something God gives us like a feeling, not primarily, that's not the first thing he does. So it's not just to say that God kind of magically takes all our traumas away and makes us feel serene. In the first instance, the peace of God, he says we are here in the realm of God doing something. He attains it for us where we couldn't and then he declares it to us, my peace I give to you. He was heralded by the angels before his arrival, the one who will bring peace. Good news. So as a starting point where we're asking ourselves the question, what will Jesus do for me? What peace will he give to me? What do I make of Galatians 5? Love, joy, peace is the deepening knowledge of the attainment of Jesus for us, declared to us by Jesus and then experienced with thanksgiving and gratitude. And that understanding is woven into every situation you face as the bedrock of who you are as a person and as a person seen before the throne room of heaven.

One whom God says I am at peace with you because Jesus has paid the penalty that you so clearly deserved. Let's finish and ask a couple of questions because we still may be saying, well, I struggle with this. I struggle to understand that. How do I get this? How do I take hold of this and experience this peace? A couple of verses from Philippians just as we finish.

Because of course we face in the first case still many, many genuine troubling circumstances that breed anxiety and fear. First thing to say is don't look for the wrong thing from Jesus.

Sometimes as we've seen at the start of what I was saying, there's the idea that we have to first of all sort our circumstances out. It's all up to us to get peace and the way we do that is by fixing things. And sometimes what we can do when we become a Christian is we can think, well, okay, I can't fix my circumstances. Jesus will do it for me. And we're still making the same mistake where we're still looking for Jesus to just fix. Now, that's fine at one level to still ask Jesus, please help me deal with this situation and take away this pain. We can ask him that.

[20 : 27] But he may not. And so if we're relying first and foremost for Jesus to change our circumstances, we may well, when we find he doesn't, say well. And that surely conclude that God doesn't love me and I have no peace. So don't look for the wrong thing from Jesus. A verse in Philippians chapter 4.

I'm going to read from verse 4 where Paul says, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I'll say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone the Lord is at hand. Don't be anxious about anything.

But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Do you see what he says there? In your difficult circumstances, while you are bringing them to God, be giving thanks. So in other words, knowing that he may not change our circumstances, but because we are in his presence and because we're in the presence of the Lord of the universe who has said to us, I give you my peace and I love you, then we give thanks even in that circumstance.

And we need to ask for grace to be able to do that. And finally, a couple of verses later, beware the death of the attention span. That's the final thing I want to say.

Beware looking for the wrong things from Jesus or having the wrong emphasis. Beware the death of the attention span. Many people say it in our culture nowadays, nobody's got an attention span anymore. Maybe that's not quite fair.

[22 : 02] But we're used to sound bites and being distracted by a million texts a day and the computers is always being on and everything. And listen to this verse in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 8.

Finally, brothers, whatever's true, whatever's honorable, whatever's just, whatever's pure, whatever's lovely, whatever's commendable, if there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about such things.

Now, think about what Jesus went to to gain you peace. Think about it often. Make it something that you sit before you.

Now, that's hard because your day is busy. But in some way, that is the business that we were in as disciples is saying, I will set before me and I will pray and ask my friends to pray for me as we do it together.

Jesus, help me to see the peace that you have attained for me, which is of eternal significance. And may it be the starting point for the change in me, the experience, the knowledge and the gratitude and the wonder of that peace that he has achieved for us that becomes the experience.

[23 : 24] And it also, should I say, becomes the starting point for the way in which we change in our behavior to others because Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who have known the peace of God and whose life is then about in difficult circumstances with people who contradict us and who even hate us bringing peace because of our Lord Jesus.

Let's pray. Lord, you are so great and wonderful. Your perfection is amazing for us to consider and we maybe don't consider it nearly enough.

And we are so struggle with these things so often. We've read and studied through the fruit of the Spirit now and it's so helpful for us to do so. And we can feel so inadequate. And so we rejoice because this is the fruit of the Spirit.

And so we pray, Holy Spirit of God, would you be at work in us, counseling us, comforting us, leading us and showing us Jesus, our wonderful Savior, and speaking to us of your grace to us and enabling us to be people who are loving and joyful and have peace and are peacemakers and all of these fruit that are to be at work in our lives.

Help us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.