

THROUGH JESUS WE HAVE PEACE**Isaiah 26:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 3:16**

Intro: On July 9, 1861, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's wife, Fanny, died in an awful accident. She had been trying to seal a packet with sealing wax and somehow her dress caught fire. She ran into screaming her husband's study and he desperately tried to put out the fire, first with a throw rug and then with his hands. In the process, Longfellow was severely burned on his face and hands. Fanny, horribly burned, slipped into a coma the next day and died.

Longfellow was so badly burned he could not even attend Fanny's funeral. He was, of course, devastated. So much so that for the next three Christmases he was not able to write his annual Christmas poem which had become his personal tradition. There was a marked lack of the peace that he once savored during the Christmas season.

To deepen his despair even more was the fact that, the Civil War, which had begun just a three months before Fanny's death, was raging through the nation. In just a month before Christmas, in November 1863, his son, who had run off to the army, was gravely wounded in action at the Battle of Hope Church in Virginia and Longfellow travelled to Washington, DC to care for his son as he slowly recovered from his nearly fatal wounds.

Finally, on Christmas Day of 1864, Longfellow resumed his Christmas traditions with words you almost certainly recognize.

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
 Their old, familiar carols play,
 And wild and sweet
 The words repeat
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
 And thought how, as the day had come,
 The belfries of all Christendom
 Had rolled along
 The unbroken song
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
 Till ringing, singing on its way,
 The world revolved from night to day,
 A voice, a chime,
 A chant sublime
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
 Then from each black, accursed mouth
 The cannon thundered in the South,
 And with the sound
 The carols drowned
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
 It was as if an earthquake rent
 The hearth-stones of a continent,
 And made forlorn
 The households born
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
 And in despair I bowed my head;
 "There is no peace on earth," I said;
 "For hate is strong,
 And mocks the song
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"
 Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
 "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
 The Wrong shall fail,*

The Right prevail,

With peace on earth, good-will to men."

Longfellow was grieving, exhausted, and frightened. But he was not hopeless because he knew peace. His God, who is our God is not dead and he does not sleep and that sin will be defeated and righteousness will be victorious and God's people will enjoy peace forevermore.

At Christmas time, in this season of Advent we celebrate, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who came into the world to bring perfect peace. We don't have the a Civil War raging as Longfellow did but, in some ways we are not far from it, with the division we have in our nation and the bloody conflicts across the world. The world needs peace and it needs the Prince of Peace. We have it as his followers. The refrain of a hymn puts it like this:

Peace, peace, wonderful peace,

Coming down from the Father above!

Sweep over my spirit forever, I pray

In fathomless billows of love!

If those waves of love bringing wonderful peace are so fathomless, that means there is plenty to go around. We need to carry it to a culture torn with strife. So let's look at it.

The text Sheila read addresses God with, *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you*, Isaiah 26:3a (ESV) . . .

Perfect Peace

- In Hebrew, the term we have translated in Isaiah 26:3 as "perfect peace" is actually shalom shalom. This is because, in Hebrew, repetition communicates intensity. It isn't just shalom; it is shalom shalom, perfect peace. We do that in English sometimes. When I'm particularly pleased about something, I'll exclaim "GOOD! GOOD!" It's not just good, it's doubly good. Or a birthday greeting sent by a loved one that says "Happy, HAPPY Birthday!" so that your happiness is compounded. Or like our neighbor who lives right next to Joe and Cindy Scott who will often greet us with "Howdy! Howdy!" But, these examples pale in comparison to what it is to have what Paul calls, . . . *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding* . . . Philippians 4:7. The peace of God is what only comes from God and only his kids can even comprehend.
- F. B. Meyer says this of the double peace we call perfect peace, "*Understand, dear soul, that it is thy privilege to live inside the double doors of God's loving care. He says to thee, 'Peace, peace.' If one assurance is not enough, He will follow it with a second and a third.*" That's good! The double doors of God's love.
- More on what the Hebrew concept of peace is in a bit when we get to Paul's words from 2 Thessalonians. But let me finish out this coverage of peace in Isaiah 26 with this: Perfect peace is . . .

A matter of the mind

- FB Meyer, who uses such picturesque language, goes on to say, that having a mind stayed on God, and trusting in him is God's double doors against the intrusion on the soul of a single note of alarm or fear. In other words, when you're afraid, put your mind on God, and put your mind at rest. Now, I know that is easier said than done, but it's true. Peace comes, when our minds are on the Lord because we trust in him. It's like this, faith and faithfulness are inseparable. You can trust God. In fact, in verse 4, which Sheila also read, we read, *Trust in the Lord forever, FOR THE LORD IS AN EVERLASTING ROCK!* Isaiah 26:4. Larry Norman sang – he's the rock that never rolls and he doesn't. Ever!
- Commentator, David Guzik writes, "*To be kept in this perfect peace is a matter of our mind. This isn't so much a matter of our spirit or of our soul or of our heart. It is a matter of our mind. We are to love the LORD our God with all of our mind (Matthew 22:37). We are transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2). We can have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16, Philippians 2:5). We are not to set our mind on earthly things (Philippians 3:19), but to set our mind on things above (Colossians 3:2). The Christian life is not an unthinking life of just doing, or experiencing, but it is also about thinking, and where we set our mind is essential in our walk before the LORD.*"
- Set your mind on the provision of God and trust in him and you will know peace. And then we move to Paul's blessing from 2 Thessalonians. Let me read it: *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace*

at all times in every way. *The Lord be with you all.* 2 Thessalonians 3:16. Paul needed to say this. He is pointing out a crying need then and right down to December 10, 2023. We need peace in the Body of Christ.

Let the Church exhibit grace and peace

- The angels sang to the shepherds, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*” Luke 2:14. Peace AMONG, those with whom he is well pleased. He’s talking about us. He’s talking about his people.
- We need to go back to the first letter to the Thessalonians to make this point. Paul begins his first letter to the Thessalonians with, *To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.* 1 Thessalonians 1:1b (ESV). This was a new greeting that Paul seems to have introduced into the Church. Leon Morris writes, “*Among Greeks peace was a negative concept as it often is with us: it meant the absence of war. But for the Hebrews, (as I have already pointed out) the term was positive. When a Hebrew said, peace be to you, he did not mean, “I hope you won't get into a fight.” but rather “I pray that you may prosper”. The Hebrew word, “shalom”, meant prosperity in the widest sense. The root is concerned with wholeness. The person who enjoys peace is thus the one whose life is well-rounded. Peace was seen as a gift of God; there is a definitely spiritual aspect to the completeness it denotes.*”
- So to greet someone with “Shalom!” or with Grace and Peace as Paul did or with a blessing of *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way*, is a prayer for complete wholeness and completeness and goodness.
- And Paul refers to the God of peace, and this is the only time he does it in his letters. But as you read this second letter to the Thessalonians, you will know that he has been addressing a very evident and unhappy division in the church. He is reminding them that the Lord they serve is a Lord of peace, and those who serve him should also be known by the fact they are his people and therefore, people of peace. At the same time, remember that Paul’s idea of peace is that Hebrew concept that peace means more than just the absence of strife. It means prosperity in the completest sense, and it is here as a reminder that it comes only as the gift of God. In the case of grace and peace as a greeting, it's very obvious that peace is only available through grace.
- In a strife torn world, the discord has even invaded the Church. We have people who call themselves Christians fighting amongst themselves. Can we not, as the people of God, at the very least, live at peace amongst ourselves? This is my Christmas wish. We are followers of the Prince of Peace – let’s be a peace with one another?
- Maybe the issue is that we have forgotten that . . .

Peace came with Jesus, peace still comes with Jesus

- Remember, the angels’ song, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!* Luke 2:14
- Peace isn’t just something that happens sometimes, for the Christ follower. It is always a part of who we are. It’s the idea of a peace that is present. No matter how the circumstances change. Peace is what we are when we are in communion with the Prince of Peace. So, come what may, no matter what, any change in that which is outward can interfere with the Christ Follower’s deep seated peace. This is because a Christ follower's peace is never independent of the Lord. He is a God of peace. Paul says he is the Lord of peace and so we are to be a people of peace. That means peace wasn’t just for shepherds in the fields watching their flocks, it’s still for us for all time. He prays that Jesus will give peace to his followers at all times and then every way.

Conclusion: Let me very briefly wrap this up and I can do it with some words from that hymn I referenced as I began this talk.

*What a treasure I have
In this wonderful peace,
Buried deep in the heart of my soul,
So secure that no power*

*Can mine it away,
While the years of eternity roll!
Peace, peace, wonderful peace,
Coming down from the Father above!
Sweep over my spirit forever, I pray
In fathomless billows of love!
Ah, soul! are you here
Without comfort and rest,
Marching down the rough pathway of time?
Make Jesus your friend
Ere the shadows grow dark;
O accept this sweet peace so sublime!
Peace, peace, wonderful peace,
Coming down from the Father above!
Sweep over my spirit forever, I pray
In fathomless billows of love!*

If you know that peace so sublime that rolls like the waves of the sea, then live it and share it. If you don't know that peace, YOU CAN! Don't wait. Know it now, because it's only through Jesus that you can truly have peace. Amen.