

The Peace that Jesus Gives

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- [0 : 0 0] One of the cool things about Christmas, run up to Christmas, you start getting presents. And the kids are next door, aren't they? Yeah, okay, good. So we all know it's not just Father Christmas that gives us presents.
- Just saying, okay. But I thought we'd just have a quick conversation about Christmas presents. And which ones not to give. They did a survey in the UK a while back.
- And people, up to 25%, a quarter of people complained about the Christmas presents they got. And they asked them, well, what kind of presents do you get that you don't enjoy? And the top few were, someone received a toilet seat.
- And they said, no, man, that's not, that's, how do you even wrap a toilet seat? But nevertheless. And then the top worst one to receive was a burial plot at Christmas time.
- Now, I know no one wants to talk about the Christmas presents we shouldn't give. It's like, it's a taboo subject because of presents. You get any presents, it's nice, it's fine. But one of the Christmas presents that I find that are unhelpful are the Christmas presents that need batteries to work.
- [1 : 1 0] Now, if you've got me one already and it's got batteries, it's fine. Just give it to me. It's all good. But why is it that we shouldn't give presents where the batteries don't work?
- Well, because inevitably the batteries run out right then and there. As you're unwrapping, you plug it in. The toy with the lights go on and then five minutes later, the thing dies.
- Okay, now what now? Well, you never have, first of all, you never have the right size battery when you need it. And when you do, you've got the two right batteries, the right sizes.
- One of them is going to be flat. It's always like that. It's the law of batteries. And so with Christmas presents and batteries, the batteries run out. The gift doesn't work.
- And there's this beginning, this little ripple of unhappiness. That's one of the reasons why we're doing a series on the gifts that God gives us.
- [2 : 1 0] Because one of the best things about the gifts that God gives is they don't run flat. They don't run out of power. They don't run out of energy. They don't run out of efficacy.
- They keep on working. In fact, the very opposite of running out of energy, because they're from God, who's our creator, they actually continually grow more and more.
- They become more and more abundant in your lives the longer that you have them. And so these are definitely gifts that are worth having. Gifts that God gives, because they last throughout our lifetime.
- And the gift we're looking at today is the gift of peace. The gift of peace. Perhaps the most sought-after commodity in the world today, and yet still one of the most elusive.
- In a recent survey that we took at St. Mark's, when asked to choose between truth, joy, freedom, and peace, the four gifts that we've been looking at, 80% said that they needed more peace in their life.

- [3 : 11] So it's a very sought-after thing in people's lives. And we all spend so much time looking for it in our own lives as well. And we also find it frustratingly elusive.
- At best, we get these little oases of peace. I do not know what the plural of oasis is. I'm just going to say oases of peace. You get them when you go on holiday.
- Oh, if you've already been on holiday, you've got a holiday to look forward to. South African holidays are the best. And sitting by the river at the campsite, oh, no worries.
- The braai is going. The beers are cold. The kids are way down there doing their own thing. Ah, you get those moments of peace. But that little oasis of peace, that little pocket of peace, never lasts.
- You always have to get back to reality. And ironically, the worst time to find peace is at Christmastime. It promises peace. Maybe you're dreading Christmastime.
- [4 : 16] Maybe your family gathering is a cause of conflict. And you're dreading getting that family together because there's going to be rumblings.
- There's going to be difficult conversations. Maybe you're facing Christmas alone. Or maybe you're feeling the financial pinch. And instead of having peace at Christmastime, your mind and your heart is in turmoil.
- And so the question isn't, can you have peace when you're having a break from everyday life? Anyone can have that for a short amount of time. But can you have peace in the busyness of everyday life?
- Especially when things go wrong. The Bible says, yes, you can. It's the promise that God gives us at Christmastime. God does give peace.
- And it's a peace that lasts even through the busyness of life and even when life goes bad. And so the peace that God gives is stubbornly connected to Christmas.
- [5 : 17] You think, why is peace always at Christmastime? It's probably the least peaceful I feel in my life. But it's connected to Christmas because it was promised that through the events of Jesus' birth, peace would come into the world in a way that it had never before.
- So that's why we read from Isaiah 9. And we're going to look at just verse 5. We're going to use that as a launching pad for looking at peace. And so Isaiah 9 verse 5 says, And you say, okay, now how do you get peace out of there?
- Because that sounds like there's a whole lot of warfare going on. Well, actually it's an image of peace. Because the things that cause warfare are going to be completely removed from God's world.
- So the warrior's boot used in battle, It's not like our modern warrior's boots used for walking. In the olden days they would have metal spikes on their boots and they would make sure that they clobbered you with those metal spike boots.
- They used them as weapons of war. Every warrior's boot used in battle to hurt and maim. And every garment that's rolled in blood, everything that's got warfare spattered onto it, conflict, will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.
- [6 : 43] It's going to be burnt up. It's going to be thrown away. The things that cause conflict in God's world, God says, is going to come to an end. How does that start? How does God do this?
- The very next verse tells us. It starts with the coming of God's Son into the world. Verse 6, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and one of the names of Jesus is this Prince of Peace.
- He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Now on Christmas Day, Nick is going to unpack those names of Jesus and who he is.

It's going to be a wonderful time to look into each of those in detail. But I'm going to look at the peace that Jesus brings. But what exactly is the peace that God wants us to have? And if he's given it to us, why don't we have it?

None of us wants to be in conflict. Why so much of our lives lived in unhappiness with others and with ourselves? And so we need to look at the peace that God wants us to have.

[7 : 49] The peace that God wants us to have. We often think of peace as simply the absence of trouble. And there's a truth to that. You know, no warfare.

But we're not currently at war. All our government, you never know in the next few weeks, months, you never know what might happen. But we're not currently at war. How come I don't have peace?

We think of peace as simply the absence of trouble. No war, no noise, no disturbance. Parents with young kids know the feeling all too well. You hear the phrase, What do I have to do to get a moment's peace around here?

So it's quiet. Nothing disturbing me. The absence of trouble. But the peace that God gives is more than just the absence of trouble.

Biblical peace is a far richer, more holistic idea. The Bible word is shalom. Shalom. That's the Hebrew word. And it's not just the lack of conflict.

[8 : 52] It's the presence of wholeness where everything in creation is functioning as God intended. And it's allowing things to flourish and to fully enjoy what they were created to be.

And so the biblical word peace occurs in sort of context that we might not expect it to. For example, in Exodus 22, it's used of the price to pay back the owner of stolen livestock.

So if you've stolen some livestock from someone, it says you need to pay them back. And it says you must pay them double. And that little phrase, pay them double, is you will pay them the shalom price.

You will pay them the price that causes peace to occur between you and the person that you've made not peace to happen. It's a payment. In Solomon, in 1 Kings chapter 9, Solomon brings shalom to the temple when he finishes building it.

And he begins the sacrifices that God wants. I'll just read the verse. 1 Kings 9 verse 25. Three times a year, Solomon used to offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar.

[10 : 05] So there's that little word peace. But it occurs later on. He burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar that he built to the Lord. And it ends with, so he finished the house. He completed the house.

That little word finished or complete is the Bible word shalom again. He shalomed. He gave peace to the temple when he completed what the temple was there to do.

Reform theologian Alvin Plantinga says that shalom is, and I'll quote, it'll be up on the screen for you, it is the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight.

It is universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight. A rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed.

Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be. Isn't that a wonderful definition of peace? Of this fully orbbed, fully dimensional, holistic idea that God wants us to have?

[11 : 13] We get a picture of it in the Garden of Eden, where mankind, Adam and Eve, have a good working relationship with each other. They're happy. They've got a good working relationship with the world around them.

The world is doing what it wants. It doesn't want to kill them. And they've got a good working relationship with God. It's important to remember that when God first made the world, this idea of peace, of flourishing, of knitting together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight.

That's how God started it. So, why don't we have it? We all know that something went wrong. Why don't we have this kind of comprehensive peace in our lives?

If God made the world to work that way, why is there no peace in it? Not this kind of peace. A little bit of peace. Touch of peace. Now, it's easy to blame others when we don't have peace.

We're very good at blaming others. Politicians, they're never the one that's caused problems in the world, in their country. Someone else is always causing problems. Politicians blame the rich.

[12 : 23] We blame the politicians. Women blame men. Children blame their parents. That first occurrence where peace between God and the world was shattered, God asked Adam, what happened here?

And Adam said, well, it wasn't me. The woman you made, she caused the problem. He was quick to blame her. And she said, no, it wasn't me. It was the snake that you made. We're quick to blame others.

But the Bible's answer is not that the problem is out there somewhere. The problem that there's conflict and warfare and agitation and disappointment and hurt, it's not primarily out there.

That causes some problems. But it primarily comes from inside us. The thing that breaks peace apart is sin. And the relationship it affects the most is the one that matters the most.

Sin shatters the relationship that we were meant to have with God. David, reflecting on what sin does, writes in Psalm 38. He says this, Where David says that he has no soundness in his bone or no health in his bone, there's that Hebrew word again, shalom.

[14 : 03] I've got no peace in my bones. He's got this internal anguish. And it's affecting his physical health because his relationship with God is broken.

This is the root cause of not having peace in our lives. Unless you first have peace between you and God, which is the peace that your soul desperately needs and looks for, you will never find peace in your relationships or in anything else in the world.

That explains why you can never find peace in the things of this world no matter how hard you try. You've got to make peace with God first. C.S. Lewis writes this, The only reason the non-Christian can experience any peace at all is because God in his mercy allows it.

Every calm breath, every moment of joy, every sense of stability is borrowed grace. But he says do not confuse that with true peace.

Worldly peace is temporary. It's circumstantial. It's fragile. It depends on health, on money, on distraction or control. It fades the moment suffering arrives or death comes into view.

[15 : 21] That kind of peace cannot stand when the night gets long and the soul is forced to be honest. And he concludes true peace is found only in Christ.

It's not the absence of trouble but the presence of truth. Jesus said my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you.

This peace fulfills because it reconciles us to our creator, anchors us beyond death and satisfies the soul the world can never reach.

Everything else is borrowed comfort. That's all C.S. Lewis. So friends, don't live for borrowed comfort.

The stuff, if you've got an uneasiness in your life, all of the things that you're uneasy with out there, relationships, your own mind, your past, your worry about the future, all of that are indications that there's a deeper unease, a deeper unpeace, and that's between you and God.

[16 : 33] But God invites you to come get true comfort from him. Counterfeit peace doesn't have the power to sustain you when the things of this world get rough. But the peace that comes from God does sustain you because it fixes the root cause of unrest in your life.

It fixes your relationship with God. And that's only doable through Jesus, which is what the Christmas story is all about. So we're going to spend some time looking at the peace that Jesus gives us.

The peace that Jesus gives us. The peace of Jesus. That's why the answer to finding true peace is found in Jesus. Isaiah 9 prophesies that God will send his son to bring peace.

Okay, but how does Jesus fix this relationship between you and God? How does he bring peace? Well, Isaiah spells it out in Isaiah chapter 53.

And it shows us, it prophesies just what it takes, what it's going to take for Jesus to make peace between us and God. So I'm going to read from Isaiah 53 verse 4 to 6.

[17 : 42] Verse 5 will come up on the screen, but you might want to turn to Isaiah chapter 53 or look it up on your phone. It's a central piece of Isaiah that unpacks what it's going to cost to make peace between God and man.

It talks about this servant of God who the New Testament tells us, identifies, is Jesus.

Verse 5 will be on the screen, but I'm going to read from verse 4 to verse 6. Isaiah 53 verse 4 to verse 6. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering.

Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was on him. This is how God is going to bring peace between himself and us.

[18 : 49] We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. That iniquity is iniquity.

It's the stuff that causes for peace to not take place. Isaiah foresees that Jesus would suffer and die as one punished by God, not for anything he had done wrong, but in the place of those who deserve it.

At the cross, Jesus took the brunt of the warfare between God and the world. The Bible talks about his death as a propitiation. Jesus' death takes away God's anger for the conflict that we have caused.

The gospel is that you've caused problems in this world and problems for others, and there needs to be some sort of payment made for that.

Some sort of justice needs to come forward. And God's answer says, well, I know that you can't make that payment by yourself. I'm going to make that payment for you.

Commenting on this passage, John Piper says, Jesus didn't die because he had a conflict with his father.

[20 : 01] He died because we have a conflict with the father. His death paid for all the conflicts we have caused. Isn't that amazing?

Isn't that a gift to take hold of? Imagine trying to pay for all of the nonsense you've created in this world. Every fight, every argument, every unkind word, every slander, every, maybe you've punched people, maybe you've stabbed people.

All the hatred, that little murmuring. Imagine all of the bad things you've done to other people. Has to be visited on you in one instance.

It would be a bad day for you to stand there and take that punishment. And that's just between you and people. What about the nonsense you've caused in the world around you? The litter.

The pollution. Just consuming, eating while other people are hungry. Not even thinking about it. Eating something, throwing it away. Oh, just using up the resources that God gives us.

[21 : 11] And then think about, ooh. But all of that is actually aimed against the God of this world. And if he needs to hold you to account, there's going to be a problem.

And so what Jesus did is to stand between God's anger and us. That's why God had to send his son. No mere man can absorb that kind of wrath and survive.

And it's not one person's wrath that Jesus took on himself. The entire world's sin. The entire history of the world's sin.

At the moment there's seven billion people on planet earth. Just one person's sin would require a person's life.

And there's seven billion people right now that Jesus absorbs all of God's anger against that. That's why you need Jesus if you're going to have peace.

[22 : 09] You don't make peace with God. God is the one who makes peace with you through Jesus Christ. So that's the gift that God offers.

How do we get that gift? How do we receive it? What must I pay for that? What would you be willing to pay?

If on Christmas Day you wake up and there's the gift and it says peace from God to you.

Or it says peace between you and your family. Or it says peace between you and your past. That would be the first present you'd want to unwrap, wouldn't it?

Well the thing about a gift is you don't have to pay for it. It's a gift. You just have to say thank you. And open it. And use it. The gospel tells us that this priceless peace that you cannot pay for yourself is fully paid for by Jesus.

[23 : 19] It's a gift that God offers to anyone who wants it. All you have to do is receive it. And you do that by trusting in Jesus as the only peacemaker between you and God. So that's our reading from Romans.

Romans 5 verse 1 says, Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now that word faith sounds like a Bible word.

It just means to believe or to trust in what God has done, to trust in what Jesus has done. It's to be honest with yourself that you can't earn this peace.

You can't undo what you've undone. And you don't have to make promises that you can't keep. I promise I'll never do that again. Oh God, if you just help me, I promise I'll never do this. You can't do that.

[24 : 18] Don't make those promises. You're going to break them. God takes you as you are and changes you. A few verses later, Paul writes this.

He says, You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless to fix anything, Christ died for the ungodly.

And God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And so friends, that's where peace starts for you.

With God and with Jesus. And what God wants you to do is lay down your weapons of war. Your words.

Your anger. Your self-preservation. Your hostility. Your blame. None of that is going to achieve anything for you, except more pain, more sorrow, more regret, more unrest, more unease in your life.

[25 : 22] And so come to Jesus as you are. And he will begin a work in you that will totally transform your life. Because even in this little section in Romans, the promise isn't just that he died for you to give you peace.

Jesus came back to life again. And his coming back to life again gives you new life. It puts power into you that makes this peace last.

It's not a peace that just comes to rest in you. It's a peace that begins to flow out of you towards others. So that you can have peace inside between you and God.

But then you start having peace between you and your family members that you have difficulties with. People in the world that you've got problems with. Your past that still bugs you. All of that can be dampened by the power of the resurrected Christ in your life.

I'm just going to read from Romans 5 verse 10. He says this, Paul is comparing what Jesus does on his, what happened at his death, with what will happen when he's come back to life.

[26 : 41] As powerful as Jesus' death was, that was only the beginning of what Jesus is going to do for you and for others. Jesus' resurrection is going to give you life-giving power to be like him and to become a peacemaker like he was.

That oasis of peace you used to find from time to time, if you come to Christ, becomes a constant life-giving spring of peace that overflows through you to others.

And so the best gift you can receive at Christmas for you is this gift of peace from Christ. But it's the best gift that you can give to others is to receive this gift of Christ because then they begin to taste the peace of God.

At Christmas time, we spend time with family. There's many families that need a peacemaker. They need you to be the peace of Jesus to them.

Maybe you need to invite a family member to your Christmas lunch that you would maybe not have in the past. Maybe a family member needs that phone call that you don't want to make.

[27 : 56] Maybe there's someone that you need to apologize to for something you've said or done. Maybe there's someone that needs to hear that you've forgiven them this Christmas time.

Whatever it is, choose one action you can take this Christmas that will bring more peace between you and others.

Come to Christ. Receive His peace. And when you've done that, start spreading that peace out to others. Choose one person you need to be on better terms with and do something to start building that bridge.

Choose one memory that causes you unrest in your heart and rest in your soul. Lay it at the foot of the cross and let the peace that Jesus purchased with His blood wash it away and be at peace this Christmas.

Let me pray for us. Lord Jesus, we realize that we've got so much unrest in our hearts and minds because of the things we've done and said and haven't done and because of stuff that's happened to us.

[29 : 09] Lord, you paid for all of the unrest and the turmoil and the hate and the violence by dying for us.

So Lord, you brought peace between us and God. Will you be our peace this Christmas and help us to be peacemakers in turn? Amen.