

The Way of Peace – Various Passages

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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INTRODUCTION

Are you at peace this morning? We live in anything but a peaceful world, don't we? Though we live in a country that would be considered peaceful compared to many places in the world, there are endless opportunities to be anxious, distracted, stressed out and fearful. And there is much lack of peace between people of various political persuasions and worldviews and even race and color. Many, in fact, think America is more divided right now than it's ever been. And yet in the midst of all this, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, offers us a much different way of living life in the world and within the body of Christ. Having brought us to permanent peace with God through repentance and faith in him, Jesus invites us to allow that peace with God and his presence and power that brings, to have their full effect; giving us lasting inner peace and then transforming our relationships with other people and revealing the glory of God to them and us as you and I begin walking in the way of peace.

Remember those words from Luke 1:79 that described what Jesus, the sunrise from on high, would come to do? He would come:

to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

You see, Jesus wants to guide his people to leave behind the dead ways of the world – the ways of those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death – and to walk into his ways of life and peace.

Paul's teachings in Romans 3:9-18 reveal that the dead ways of the world are based on selfishness and selfish gain, using dishonest speech and whatever else is needed to serve our own purposes and get what we want. It's a path that leads to ruin and misery...to division and hostility and anxiety and bitterness among people. But the life-giving ways of the Prince of Peace turn all that upside down and result in lasting peace for our souls and growing peace in our relationships. It

begins with permanent peace with God through repentance and faith in Christ and then God intends it to grow into a radical lifestyle of peace.

So I ask you again: *Are you a person at peace today?* Does peace characterize your inner state of mind as you navigate the daily challenges of life? And does the peace with God you've been given flow over into your relationships with other people. If we're honest, we can all grow in this area, including myself! Well, in our study of Scripture this morning and in my next sermon, I'd like to lead us to discover and embrace God's plan for peace in the present realities of our daily lives. This week we'll focus on the way of peace...how to grow and multiply peace within ourselves. And then in the next message, we'll focus on the life of peace...how the peace with God we've been given and the inner peace he's growing within us will affect our relationships with others.

And as we begin, let Jesus' words to his disciples encourage you that real, life-transforming peace is possible for every true follower of Jesus Christ today:

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 hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

John 16:33

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

Jesus wants to give you enduring peace in the midst of a very troubled world. Let's consider his plan for bringing that about this morning.

THE BROKEN WALLS OF PEACE

The first truth about the way of peace we need to understand is what I'd like to call *The Broken Walls of Peace*. I recently watched an old Disney movie with my family about that difficult time period in history when what was called "the iron curtain" was a living reality for people living in Communist countries. Millions of people were literally imprisoned in their own countries, not allowed to leave and prevented from doing so with a fence or a wall and the threat of being shot or

executed if they tried to cross it. In those countries, such as Russia and East Germany, the government banned God and religion and watched people closely to make sure they weren't trying to escape or trying to read the Bible or worship God or, worst of all, criticize the government. And consequences were severe for those caught doing any of these things. There was literally a wall dividing people in communist countries from the free world.

Some of you old timers may remember the movie we watched. It's called, "Night Crossing," and tells the story of two families who, after a friend's son was shot when he tried to escape East Germany, concocted a plan to secretly construct a hot air balloon and literally fly over the wall and into West Germany. It's a pretty intense movie and gives you a picture of what life was like in a Communist country and how your every move was watched if there was any hint that you might be trying to escape or that you were criticizing the government. I won't tell you what happened just in case you haven't seen it yet, but check it out sometime.

The movie gives us a great illustration of a spiritual reality that existed before Christ came. Before Christ came, there was a huge wall separating the Jewish people from the rest of the people groups, and the Jewish religious leaders had been building it higher and higher through the centuries. Salvation and peace with God have always been available to all people, Jewish or not, through repentance and faith in the one true God; but before Christ, walking with God always involved physical circumcision to become a part of the Jewish covenant community and a commitment to follow the commandments and ordinances of the Jewish Law given by Moses.

Additionally, though God always intended the Jewish people to welcome and invite and offer his salvation to people of all nations, over the years they had allowed pride over being God's chosen people to lead them into looking down on other people groups and building the wall even higher. With Satan wanting to keep people imprisoned in his country and the people on the other side building the wall even higher, the difficulty of finding freedom was getting a lot like having to construct a hot air balloon to get over.

But the wonderful reality is that Jesus came and changed all that. He did more than just lower the wall. He broke it down...he smashed it... once and for all. Listen to how he did it in Ephesians 2:11-19:

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Jesus himself is our peace! He tore down the wall dividing Jews and Gentiles by fulfilling and then abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances that had previously guided how to live life with God in the Israelite covenant community. He did this by obeying it perfectly and then paying the complete penalty for all people from all times, who had all been unable to fully keep it and live up to the holiness of God. No longer were physical circumcision and animal sacrifices and seeking to keep all the rules and regulations of the Mosaic Law necessary to live at peace with God in community with his people. Jesus brought the new way, the new wineskins, of God's Holy Spirit taking up residence within everyone, Jew or Gentile, who trusts in him for salvation...His Spirit who then guides them and empowers them to love God and love each other... the new way of the Spirit as opposed to the old way of the written code.

Through his obedient life and his work on the cross, Jesus made peace between Jew and Gentile and removed any basis for one people group to claim superiority over another. In Christ, we all, male and female, black and white, Hispanic and

Indian, Asian and Arab, and on and on, all of us have equal access through the Spirit to the Father and become one unified body; each of us accepted, secure and significant and having something to offer through God's work in us...all saints and sons and daughters and members of God's own household. Jesus himself is our peace!

Consider these verses which so beautifully express how Jesus has become the peace that reconciles and brings together as one, people from all nations, tribes and tongues:

Romans 10:12-13

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Galatians 3:26-28

26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:11

11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

These are the broken walls of peace that provide the foundation for peace with other people. And we as God's people should be blazing the trail in this hostile and divided world to bring together and reconcile people of all races, tribes and tongues. May we be the first to embrace people of different color or race from us and the last to ever treat someone differently or talk negatively about them because they're of a different color or race. And may we treat male and female with equal value and significance. Yes, different roles, different giftings, but always equal value and importance in Christ. Jesus died to break down these walls and bring peace and reconciliation. Let's never build them back up, no matter how prevalent it may be in the culture we live in.

And may these truths encourage you if you've been scarred by other people who've told you that you have nothing to offer or that you're less significant than other people. That's a lie from the pit of hell. The truth is: Every person has been personally and uniquely created by God himself and finds equal value and significance and purpose in Christ. And the body of Christ needs each of us to operate in our giftings if we're to actually be the body of Christ in a way that glorifies him and represents him well!

THE PRINCIPLES OF PEACE

Well, I want to consider now what I've called *The Principles of Peace*. How can you and I begin to leave behind the dead and divisive ways of the world and allow the peace of the Prince of Peace to grow in our lives and relationships? I'm going to share with you 3 key principles of peace found in Scripture...3 key ways to begin growing and living peace in your life. The first is this: *The Peace of Knowledge with Faith*. The apostle Peter spoke of a way to **multiply** peace in your life...in other words, to cause peace to grow and reproduce within you. Listen to what he says in 2 Peter 1:1-2:

1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: 2 May grace and PEACE be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Notice first that statement about obtaining "***a faith of equal standing with ours.***" That's the broken walls of peace again. Any person, no matter what race, sex, color or background, can have a faith of equal standing with Peter and Paul and John and the other disciples of Christ. That's pretty amazing, because it's easy to think of these greats as way out of our league. And yet every true follower of Christ has a faith of equal standing with theirs and it simply comes by the righteousness of Jesus Christ that's credited to every person who repents of their sin and trusts in Christ alone for salvation.

But when we've done that and come to permanent peace with God, notice that Peter tells us how peace can be multiplied in our lives. He says that peace is multiplied *in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*. So if you want to grow peace in your life, it will only happen as you diligently seek him and know him

more and more through his Word. You need to know what he's like and what's really true about life and your relationship with him if you want peace to be multiplied.

But knowledge by itself is not enough. It needs to be united with faith. Listen to Paul in Romans 15:13:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

How do you get filled with peace and it's partner, joy? ***In believing***. Knowledge of God needs to be united with belief that it's true and that it's actually meant to be applied to your real life right now. Knowledge of God without belief is just head knowledge, and it will not fill us with peace, because we're not really "buyin' it." What we need is the uniting of faith with the knowledge of God. Then we can expect peace and it's partner joy to begin growing and multiplying within us. Then we'll really begin to make progress in our discipleship with Christ. Then peace and joy will begin bubbling up and multiplying and reproducing within us.

The second principle of peace I've called *The Peace of a Set Mind*. Where is your mind set most often in your daily life? What's occupying your thoughts and consuming your mind's energies? Paul in Romans 8:6 offers this wisdom:

6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

There are all kinds of things the world offers us to set our minds on. And with no effort on your part, no plan for change, your mind will naturally be constantly set on things of the world...things of the flesh... the things we think we want in this world, which could be about anything...wealth, security, safety, chocolate, getting a promotion at work, good health, a new car, the perfect husband or wife, power over other people, the affection and admiration of other people, proving yourself to be significant, we could go on and on. But the troubling truth is this: God tells us that setting our minds on these things...letting them consume our thoughts and our energies and become the main focus of our lives...is (Yikes!) death. It's a dead end that will disappoint and frustrate us and damage us deeply every time. It will keep us living in the dead ways of the world.

In contrast, if we want to grow peace in our lives, we need to rearrange our lives and priorities and thoughts around God – things of the Spirit – and cultivate ways of setting our minds on him and sharing our lives with him and communicating with him continually.

The willingness and desire to do this will grow out of the first principle of peace... as we increase in the knowledge of God and really believe that what he says is true and for our good. The spiritual disciplines can be helpful as practical tools for developing the habits of setting our minds more and more on things of the Spirit...disciplines like solitude for the purpose of prayer, meditative study of God's Word, fasting, silence, intentional acts of service, worship, and many others. These disciplines are helpful as long as we remember that they are never to be used as ways of earning God's approval or achieving merit before him. The disciplines are simply practical ways we can begin offering ourselves to God, making ourselves available to him, learning to listen to him, set our minds on him, and invite him to change us and accomplish his will through us.

The peace of a set mind...a mind set on God and communicating continually with him is profound. Listen to these two passages that describe it:

Isaiah 26:3

3 You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

Philippians 4:5b-7

The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

To multiply peace in your life, begin reorganizing your life and daily habits to encourage the setting of your mind on God more and more.

And the third and final principle of peace is what I've called *The Peace of a Practitioner*. A practitioner is someone who puts into practice what they've learned. They go beyond the head knowledge to actually using it in their real lives every day. And if you carefully read the 4 accounts of Jesus' life we have in

Scripture, the 4 Gospels, you'll be amazed at how often Jesus emphasized the importance of PRACTICING or DOING his teachings and commandments. He actually intended all of his teachings to be lived in real life by his followers. Do you believe that? Want a few examples?

Luke 6:46

"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

Luke 11:28

[Jesus] said, "Even more, those who hear the word of God and keep it are blessed."

John 14:15

If you love me, you will keep my commands.

John 14:21a

The one who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

John 14:23a

Jesus answered, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word."

And that's just a small sampling! My friends, peace will begin growing exponentially in our lives when we get serious about actually doing what Jesus taught his followers to do...actually living life the way he lived it.

Of course, the peace of a practitioner is not a new principle that arrived with Jesus. This has been the clear teaching of Scripture throughout the ages, only now with God's Spirit permanently dwelling in true followers of Christ, we're better equipped than ever to actually live God's Word. Do you want peace to take root and spread throughout your life and relationships? Then get serious about actually doing what it says by the power of the Spirit. Don't explain it away. Don't say that was just for the 12 disciples and Jesus. Say: "I'm going to try doing this and see what happens."

Consider these passages:

Psalm 119:165-168

165 Great PEACE have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble. 166 I hope for your salvation, O Lord, and I DO your commandments. 167 My soul KEEPS your testimonies; I love them exceedingly. 168 I KEEP your precepts and testimonies, for all my ways are before you.

We have all the principles of peace in these few verses, don't we? Growing knowledge of God through his Word, united with belief that it's true...a mind set on God's Word, emphasized by the idea of loving it exceedingly...and the doing and the keeping of it mentioned 3 times! And what does a person experience who lives this way? GREAT PEACE...nothing can make them stumble! Isn't that where you want to live?

And how about this one:

Isaiah 48:18

Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea;

And one more:

Philippians 4:8-9

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me...that's the growing knowledge God Paul was sharing with the Philippians. And the setting of their minds on things of the Spirit is there: **think on these things**. And finally, the peace of the practitioner: **practice these things, and the God of PEACE will be with you**.

CONCLUSION

Could it be any clearer what the principles of peace are for the follower of Christ? And these are all things we know to be the clear teachings of Scripture about how to multiply peace in our lives and relationships. But the question is: Are we ready to finally get serious about rearranging our lives and priorities and practices to foster the growing of peace in our daily lives? Are we willing to get serious about diligently seeking God and making ourselves available to him? Or are we too concerned about and consumed with the things of the flesh... the tempting and abundant pastimes that are being thrown at us continually by the world around us? Are we among those who are going their own way and being choked by the worries, riches and pleasures of life?

May I challenge you, in these early days of a brand new year, to spend time alone with God this week for the purpose of evaluating your life and how you spend your time?...asking him to guide you to arrange it in a way that will allow you to begin engaging each of these principles of peace in order to grow and multiply peace in your life. How can you arrange your life so that the God of peace can speak into it continually, can captivate your mind and keep it focused on things of the Spirit, and can give you the desire, the courage, and the commitment to put into practice what Jesus has so clearly taught us about how to live life?

When that begins to happen, you can expect that his priorities will become your priorities and you'll begin finding your joy and satisfaction and delight in the kinds of things Jesus found his satisfaction in. Suddenly those things of the world we've been pursuing so frantically won't sound near as appealing as what God has for us.

Isaiah 32:17

And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

Isn't that where you want to live?!

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

For Additional Study and Application

Jesus is our peace who has broken down the wall separating the people of Israel from the rest of the people groups, making one new body out of people from all tribes, tongues and nations (see Ephesians 2:11-22). Read the following passages: Romans 10:12-13; Galatians 3:26-28; Colossians 3:11. What do they teach us about how God's people should relate to people of other color, sex, or nationality? Do you have any struggles in this area? Describe.

What are some things you can do personally to break down some of the barriers that exist between you and people of other color, race or nationality within your circle of influence?

Of the three principles of peace outlined in the sermon, which one needs the most attention in your life? Explain. List some ideas on how you can grow in that area and how you can rearrange some things in your life to foster that growth.

Spiritual disciplines were mentioned in the sermon as helpful in learning to set our mind on things of the Spirit. When you hear the phrase "spiritual disciplines" what is your reaction? What comes to mind? Why? List as many spiritual disciplines you can think of. Which of these do you engage in regularly? From time to time? Never? Which would you like to do more?

Word to the wise: Spiritual disciplines done to earn God's favor or achieve merit before him lead to legalism and pride. Spiritual disciplines done for the purpose of knowing God more, setting our minds on him, and making ourselves available for his will to be done through us are life-changing and peace multiplying.