

THE GLORIOUS GIFT OF PEACE

Romans 5:1-11
Philippians 4:4-9

Good morning!

What a joy it is to be preaching again today! Thank you, Pastor Matt, for asking me to step in today.

For those of you who are following along with the theme of the book “Believe”, you will know that today’s topic is “Peace”. I’ll use some of the book’s outline in this message – in accordance with the approach being used in this series – but with some variation on the theme.

On page 370 of the book, Randy Frazee says:

“Most of us think of peace as a feeling. We want to trade our anxiety, depression and fear for calm and tranquility. There are many harmful and temporal ways people attempt to achieve this feeling, most notoriously by using alcohol or drugs. Biblical peace, however, starts not with the feeling of peace but with the source of peace, namely a strong and healthy relationship with God and with others:

He goes on to outline 3 basic Christian concepts with respect to peace:

1. Peace with God
2. Peace with Others
3. Peace with Yourself (Inner Peace)

...and that’s a good outline.

I’ll be following that for the most part, but after reading it, I thought there were a few things that needed to be stressed, especially as this is Palm Sunday and Good Friday and Easter are just a few days away.

For example, what IS peace?

Randy Frazee says that “Peace with God is possible only through the Prince of Peace”, and that’s absolutely, 100% true. Jesus Christ IS the Prince of Peace.

But what do we have **before** we have peace with God? That’s something we need to take a good hard look at again, because everything else about peace in this 3-part outline flows out of that. Everything else.

The Scriptures for today are taken from the book of Romans and the Letter to the Philippians, though there will be plenty more supporting texts. Hear now the reading of the Word of God from Romans, Chapter 5, beginning in verse 1:

Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die — but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, how much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

And in Philippians:

Philippians 4:4-9

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

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. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me — practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

The Word of God. For the people of God. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

Almighty God, to Whom all hearts are open,
All desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid.
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
By the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit,
So that we may perfectly love You
And worthily magnify Your Holy Name,
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen

When we look at the meaning of “peace”, there are definitions that affirm the earlier comment, that most of us think of peace as a feeling. Dictionary definitions include:

- Untroubled
- Rapport
- Calm, quiet, tranquil

But the definition goes further:

- Pact, accord
- Armistice, truce
- A state of mutual harmony between peoples, groups, or personal relationships
- A state or period in which there is no war, or a war has ended

So, what does the bible mean by peace?

Well, the answer is “yes”. All of them. And that’s the “something” we need to take a good hard look at again – especially the ending of a war.

In the first verse of Romans 5, Paul starts out by saying:

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ,” [Romans 5:1]

A cliché perhaps, but what is there word “therefore” there for?

Seriously, what does the word “therefore” signify? What’s about to follow?

That’s right, a conclusion!

What comes before the conclusion?

The premise, the arguments, right!

That’s what Paul has been doing in Romans. He starts out his Magnum Opus by declaring “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation for everyone who believes”. [Romans 1:16]

Interesting, isn’t it? Why would he ever feel the need to say he isn’t ashamed of the gospel? A fascinating study in and of itself, but that’s not the point of this message ...

But what does Paul do immediately after making this point? He begins to expound the gospel, NOT by declaring God’s good news – which, as you know, is what the word “gospel” means – but by emphatically spelling out the bad news. He spends the rest of Chapter 1, all of Chapter 2 and the first part of Chapter 3 doing just that.

Beginning in verse 18 of chapter 1: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...so that men are without excuse.”

Paul is going out of his way to spell out as clearly as he knows how that every single one of us – then and now – needs to understand in the depth of our souls that not one of us is righteous. No not one. As Isaiah said: our “righteousness” is like filthy rags. *[Isaiah 64:6]*

We are sinful the very core of our being and that sin taints and infects everything – absolutely everything – that we think, say, and do.

He restates it in Ephesians, Chapter 2 like this: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins ... like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath”.

The bad news that Paul is laboring to point out is that every single one of us, in our natural sinful human nature, is an object of wrath. Worthy and fully deserving of the wrath of God.

Not exactly a warm and fuzzy message, is it? And there are plenty of people who refuse to talk about it. Even in Jeremiah’s day, the Prophets were declaring: “Peace, peace” when there was no peace. *[Jeremiah 6:14]*

In our natural, sinful selves, we are at enmity with God. At war with Him.

Now wait just a minute!

How many unbelievers feel they are at war with God? Few, if any, right? A few may be overtly hostile, but it’s safe to say that most feel nothing of being at war with God, right?

Hardly a surprise, though, is it? If you’re dead in transgressions and sins, you’re not going to feel anything spiritually ... until someone points out a sinful act of any sort, THAT’s when the hostility arises. Who do you think you are to tell me what’s right or wrong, to impose your morality on me!

But that spiritually dead state is precisely what Paul is addressing here and, in that state, we were objects of wrath!

Again, Paul is spelling out the bad news: in our natural, spiritually dead condition, no one is righteous, no not one. And he’s saying that nobody understands the seriousness of that condition. We are objects of divine wrath, a justly so!

That’s the bad news.

Paul then spends the rest of chapter 3 and all of chapter 4 spelling out the good news – the gospel. But the good news is only good when seen in contrast to the bad.

For the church to be telling spiritually dead sinners that God loves them unconditionally is exactly the wrong message. What does a spiritually dead sinner hear when told that God loves him or her unconditionally?

Oh, that's nice. No conditions ... no need to repent, no need to change my sinful ways, no need embrace Christ, I can carry on as I am and know that God loves and treasures me just as I am ... no judgment.

No, Paul didn't do that, did he? He was not ashamed to spell out the bad news in order to explain and spell out the good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And he does so with brilliant clarity. He no sooner finishes saying that no one is righteous, no not one when he boldly declares: "But now, a righteousness FROM God, apart from law has been made known ... [and] this right righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" [*Romans 3:21-22*]

He says much the same thing again in Ephesians, chapter 2: "But, because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved". [Ephesians 2:4-5]

We're not righteous, but the God Who has every right to pour out His wrath against ungodly sinners provides the very righteousness we need. And we receive it by trusting Jesus Christ alone. It's HIS perfect righteousness that is given to us. Freely.

One of the non-negotiable cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith is the sinlessness of Jesus Christ. He lived His entire life without sin. He was 100% sinless.

As a sinner, I can barely wrap my mind around that. I struggle against sin every single day ... and, quite frankly, I'm sick of it! To live a life without sin is almost incomprehensible. But that's what Jesus Christ did.

He had to. If anyone is to be saved from the just wrath of a Holy God, He had to.

Good Friday is just a few days away. The day we remember Christ's death on the cross. It's how God can reconcile Himself with His enemies without sacrificing His own Holy nature.

He CANNOT simply remove our sin and leave it at that. It must be objectively dealt with. And on the cross, that's precisely what He does.

It's very simple and straightforward, but horrific at the same time.

Two words summarize the cross: expiation and propitiation.

Expiation – the transfer of the sinner's sin to Christ – removal of sin from the sinner

Jesus Christ took it on Himself willingly and at that moment in history became the most concentrated mass of sin and evil the world had ever known.

“God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” ... *2 Corinthians 5:21*

Literally – God made Him who knew no sin, sin.

Propitiation – the outpouring of God’s wrath on His own Son on the cross against that entire mass of sin and evil. Christ turns aside the wrath of God from us and took it on Himself instead.

Almighty God, who had been holding it back, poured out His wrath against that sin. For three hours, during which time Jesus Christ cried out from the pit of hell, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?”

Double Imputation

And while my sin is being dealt with, He provides me with a coat of perfect righteousness, because I don’t have any in my natural state. By faith, we exchange our sin for His righteousness.

But for anyone who does not put their personal trust in Christ and in Christ alone, they will have to face the wrath of God that is yet to come.

So now, when we put our trust in Him to save us from the wrath that is still to come, we are justified. And in that justification, we are reconciled to a Holy and Righteous God.

Have you truly put your personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ? If not, it’s not too late. Do it today!

Okay, we’re now justified. What, then, is the first fruit of that justification?

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ,” Rom 5:1

That’s right: peace with God. That’s the “therefore” ... we have peace with God.

Present tense – we have peace with God NOW. The war is over!

We’re no longer enemies of God, no longer at enmity with God!

God Himself wrote and signed the peace treaty unilaterally. And He signed it with the blood of Christ:

“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” ... *Romans 5:11*

The war is over! For those of us who are justified, we have peace with God. That’s the very first fruit of our justification. We have it! Peace with God, now – not sometime in the future.

... It’s the glorious gift of peace with God.

And it's not something He is going to take away the next time I sin. I may be sick of sin, and He will discipline me over it, when necessary, as a loving Father should, but I have peace with Him. As it says in 1 John 1:9, I can confess my sin and He will forgive me every time and cleanse me from ALL unrighteousness.

But peace with God is not the only fruit, is it? Verse 2 of chapter 5: "we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we now stand..."

Can you imagine how a first century Jew would hear that? Peace with God AND access into His presence? **Access?**

For centuries, there was a barrier between the living God and the people of God. There was a huge curtain separating the Holy of Holies and the outside. And once a year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies – behind that curtain – to make atonement for the people before the LORD.

Do you remember what happened to that curtain while Christ was on the cross?

When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice – His victory cry "It is finished" – He gave up His Spirit and breathed His last, and "at that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." [Matthew 27:50-51]

Access into God's presence granted! No more separation.

Peace with God AND access into His presence.

And now that we have peace with God, we can extend that same peace to others and learn to trust in it for our daily lives.

Peace is part of the fruit of the Spirit, as we all know. But that's not just an inner peace, it's a Spirit-filled desire to have peace – real peace – with our neighbors, and especially with our enemies. Not by being a doormat, but by actively engaging in efforts for peace.

There are many examples in the bible of this ...

Abram and Lot with a dispute of shared land and resources. [Genesis 13:1-18]

King Solomon's request of God for wisdom to govern the people rightly [1 Kings 4:20-25] – boy, do we ever need that today, right?

And Jesus Himself, in the Sermon on the Mount, tells us to be reconciled with one another before placing our gifts before the altar, clearly emphasizing that reconciliation is by far the more important sacrifice. He also tells us to settle matters quickly with our adversary who is taking us to court. [Matthew 5:21-26]

Both Jesus and Paul tell us to love our neighbors, our enemies; to bless those who persecute us; and not to repay anyone evil for evil; to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those

who mourn; to live in harmony with one another and “if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” *[Romans 12:18]*

Paul also tells us in Romans 13 to submit to the governing authorities, including in paying our taxes. And no, I’m not an IRS agent making a plug for April 15...

And then, Paul tells us in Romans 14 and 15 not treat one another with contempt, to live with one another peaceably, not quarreling over minor matters, and to make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification, especially over “disputable matters”. *[Romans 14:1 – 15:13]*

And God gives us the grace we need to live this kind of life of peace with one another.

... It’s the glorious gift of peace with others.

But as we look to live a life of peace with one another, it must always be on God’s terms. We can’t expect God to “be on my side”, or demand He do this or do that because I know best. He’s not a cosmic bellhop or Santa Claus who is expected to give me everything I want.

Even the people expected that of Jesus Christ in His day, didn’t they? Healings on demand ... Would you repeat the loaves and fish miracle today, please? ... Hey, how about some more of that miraculous wine from that wedding feast?

And even as we celebrate Palm Sunday, we remember the people were laying down palm branches as Jesus entered Jerusalem, expecting Him to become a superstar political leader and throw out the Roman occupation. And less than a week later, they were all clamoring for His death because He wouldn’t do it ... it’s not why He came.

That’s our sinful human nature, isn’t it? If He doesn’t do what we want of Him, we discard Him. We turn from Him.

Where are each of us today? Close or distant from Christ? If distant, why? Has he disappointed you? Is He not doing for you what you want of Him? Is He too slow in answering your prayer in the affirmative?

Trust him! He was willing to lay down His life for you. He knows us better than we know ourselves, and He certainly knows what we need. And one of those needs is to recognize the difference between “needs” and “wants”.

We can all think of examples, I know, so I’m not going to do so here. But we do need to strive to bring our “wants” into alignment with our “needs”.

And how exactly do we do that?

As believers we are a royal priesthood and every one of us can go directly to God without an intermediary. Again – access to God! We can come before the very throne of God – in humility to be sure – and be welcomed into His presence and pray directly to Him.

Which is precisely what Paul tells us to do. Hear again from Paul while he was in prison:

Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord ... by prayer and petition – with thanksgiving – present your requests to God. And a peace from God which defies comprehension is given to us. Think about righteousness and do what is right – pray and obey – and the God of peace will be with you.

It's that simple.

Remember what God has done for you. Remember the price Jesus Christ paid. Embrace Him by faith every single day.

Our justification was a onetime event when – through faith – we have a permanent and present peace with God.

That's the foundation.

But our sanctification is work. We are to be working out that salvation in fear and trembling day in and day out, using the strength the LORD provides just for that purpose.

“Therefore, my dear friends ... continue to work out your salvation in fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.”

[Philippians 2:12-13]

He gives us the grace of His strength to live out our lives according to His good purpose and gives us an inner peace while doing so. An inner peace that defies understanding, especially in making difficult life choice decisions. Or in facing a calamity or some serious sorrow. Or when under attack from the enemy. Or whatever deep struggle there may be...

I don't know about you, but platitudes don't help. Point me to my justification every time. Help me remember what God has done for me so I can see it is well with my soul.

THAT'S when I have this inner peace. Regardless of the struggle, that's when this inner peace is strongest.

And this kind of peace is especially sweet, isn't it?

Indescribable ... wonderful ... stunning and staggeringly sweet.

... It's the glorious gift of inner peace FROM God.

And what is the fruit He produces by it is? ... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The fruit of the Spirit.

And notice, here in Galatians, Paul doesn't say “fruits” (plural). This fruit is singular. All of them is a fruit of the Spirit worked out in us by grace in our ongoing sanctification.

1. Peace with God in our justification. The war is over!

2. Peace with others, and
3. Peace with ourselves in our ongoing sanctification.

Peace is a grace of God from beginning to end.

And when the time finally comes for us to leave this world – as Luther said: to “let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also” – we can truly Rest in Peace.

Thanks be to God.

Amen!

Let us pray ...

Benediction.

Jesus: “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives, give I unto you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” *[John 14:27]*

Go now, in peace, to love and serve the Lord.