

EFC

December 17, 2023

The Christmas Gift of Peace with God: Peace in Every Circumstance

John 14:27

Good morning, English Fellowship Church! My name is Jeremy, and I'm one of the Pastors here. It is my privilege to open God's Word with you this morning, as we consider the peace Jesus came to give that first Christmas morning. Thank you, Pastor John, for helping us see that peace with God comes from first being reconciled to God through the forgiveness of our sins by grace through faith in Jesus, who died on the cross and rose again to save us and give us eternal life. And thank you for helping us see that experiencing the peace of God in our lives comes from knowing the character of God, who is the God of peace.

Pray.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is a respected poet in the history of the United States. In a moment I will read "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" for you. But first, you need to know his life circumstances when he wrote it on Christmas day, 1863. Henry was the father of six children, one of whom died as an infant. His wife, Fanny, had died two years earlier. Henry's oldest son was shot through both shoulders in the US civil war on November 27, and was almost paralyzed. Less than one month later, Longfellow wrote "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" to try and capture the tension between the peace Jesus came to bring, and the brutal circumstances of his life. Let me read portions of it:

(Christmas Peace)

*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!*

(War)

*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!"*

Longfellow captures in poetry what many of us may wrestle with. Peace is something we all want. But it is also something out of reach in our circumstances. Reading the news, talking with Ivan who cuts my hair, talking with taxi drivers: "If we fix the drug problem, if we can stop the violence, if we grow the economy, then everything will be better, and we will have peace."

Even as I talk with fellow Christians, I often hear statements like this, too. We know we are at peace with God in Jesus Christ and He is now for us, but our worldly circumstances unsettle us and we allow them to keep us from experiencing the peace of God. We wonder, "Is peace an illusion in this life?"

But Longfellow's poem does not end here; there is one more stanza that rightly proclaims that God brings peace that will indeed prevail, no matter our circumstances:

*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's circumstances hadn't changed when he wrote that stanza: his wife was still dead, his son lay recovering, and the war still raged.

But God is not dead; He does not sleep. In the end, God's peace prevails.

And we know how this is true. In God's Son, Jesus, we have peace that endures, and is not overcome by our circumstances in this world. Jesus himself tells us clearly that the peace he gives us is not based on the circumstances of our lives on earth when he says in John 16:33, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation."

And so, I want to consider with you the peace Jesus came to give us, and how we can walk more fully in God's peace, no matter our circumstances in life.

In John 14:27 Jesus says, "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."

Jesus says that He gives HIS peace to His followers.

- Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God – Romans 5:1
- The peace of God that is founded upon God's character – Isaiah 26:3-4

Jesus says His peace is given "not as the world gives."

- Common in New Testament times to wish someone peace when you say farewell as Jesus is doing, since He is about to be crucified, die, rise, and ascend into heaven
- The best "peace" the world can give are wishful words, and desires for peaceful circumstances or tranquility within – but they are desires without the power to give peace.
 - o Like when we say, "Buen provecho". We may truly desire the person enjoys the food and is strengthened by it, but it may be disgusting to them!
- But Jesus is able to give true, lasting peace of real substance, for He is the Prince of Peace, Almighty God, our Savior.

Illustration: Balloons and our circumstances

Again, Jesus said, "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."

If we look at the context of this statement in John 14-17, we can understand how Jesus' peace is not like the peace the world gives.

1. Jesus' peace comes through faith in God and in Jesus.
 - a. John 14:1 "'Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me."
 - i. Jesus died and rose again in order to justify us and restore us to friendship with God and give eternal life to all who believe in Him.
 - ii. Once we have peace with God, the peace of God comes to us as we know God and believe in Him.
 - b. The world cannot give enduring peace because it does not believe in God nor in Jesus.
2. Jesus' peace is founded upon His ultimate victory and our eternal security in Him.
 - a. The rest of John 16:33 says: "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."
 - i. The world does not have the final say over God's people, for Jesus has overcome the world.
 - ii. Which means, He is able to promise this to everyone who trusts in Him: "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:3)
 - b. The world cannot give true peace because it cannot promise a good future; it cannot take away our sin, nor its consequences. It offers no eternal hope.
3. Jesus' peace comes to in His presence with and in us.
 - a. John 14:26-27 " But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you..."
 - i. We can experience God's peace in all of life because God is always with us!

- ii. Indeed, the Holy Spirit lives inside of every believer (Romans 8:9), and one of the fruits He produces in us is peace (Galatians 5:22-23).
 - b. The world cannot give true peace because the world cannot give us Jesus' presence.
- 4. Jesus' peace comes to us in God's Word.
 - a. We just read that the Holy Spirit will bring to our remembrance all that Jesus said, right before Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."
 - b. God has made many promises to us – and God never lies, and never fails. His word is a source of great peace!
 - i. Example: Isaiah 30:21 "And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left."
 - c. The world cannot give us solid peace, because it is left with empty platitudes and wishes for peace, but without power.
- 5. Finally, I want to reiterate again that Jesus' peace is not based on temporary circumstances. Jesus promised peace the night before He was crucified, suffering for the sins of the world. If Jesus' peace was dependent on circumstances, He would have had no peace to give! But if His peace was resilient enough to face the cross, then it is solid enough for anything we face!

Jesus came to give us solid peace that our worldly circumstances can't take away.

But it is not always easy to walk in this peace. The truth is, we have to purposefully pursue the peace of God in our lives, as we trust God to give what He has already promised us in Jesus.

Obviously, this is for those who have repented of their sins and put their trust in Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life.

1. To experience more of Jesus' peace in your life, bring your anxieties to God in prayer and thanksgiving.
 - a. Philippians 4:5-7 "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."
2. To experience more of Jesus' peace in your life, walk in the Spirit. (trust and obey)
 - a. Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit...
 - b. Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...
3. Specifically, to experience more of Jesus' peace in your life, ask the Spirit to teach and remind you of God's Word.
 - a. 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.
 - b. Bible reading plan for next year is a great opportunity
4. To experience more of Jesus' peace in your life, make sure you are obeying God and living according to His will and ways.
 - a. Sin will rob you of God's peace.
 - i. Isaiah 48:22 "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."
 - b. Proverbs 3:1-2 "My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you."
5. To experience more of Jesus' peace in your life, trust in Jesus as sovereign Lord over all.

- a. The Bible tells us that Jesus has all authority (Matthew 28:18), including over Satan (Romans 16:20), sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:56-57), and this whole world (Colossians 1:16-17), and our very lives (Philippians 2:10-11). He is King of kings, and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14), and His reign will bring perfect peace for all eternity (Isaiah 9:7). Jesus reigns, so we can rest in peace, whether we understand what He's doing or not.

If you are unwilling to entrust yourself into Jesus' nail-pierced hands, you will not experience the fullness of peace He offers; but if give yourself to Him, He will give you true peace. And when you do, the peace in your life will be a beacon of light that points others to Jesus, too. Next Sunday, Pastor John will focus us on the great privilege and calling we have to be ambassadors of the Good News of peace with God in Jesus Christ.