
¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² 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. ³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ 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. ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Romans 5:1-11 (ESV)

What do you think of when you hear the word 'peace'? Last week we considered the word 'trust', and a related concept for us as Christians is 'peace'. What do you think of when you hear the word 'peace'?

Very often when the word 'peace' is used, people may bring to mind the 'peace symbol' that became popular in the 1960s which was originally designed by Gerald Holtom for the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958.

However, when we think of the word 'peace', we may be thinking of something a little more 'close to home'. We can think of so many areas in life where we would like some 'peace'... Where are these places in your life...?

Have you ever seen anyone pace the floor without end, and not being able to sleep for some time? Over the years you may have seen people who have gone through some experience that caused shock. The result was that the people did not sleep, did not eat well, and it may have even eventually resulted in some form of mental illness. Some of these have been caused by witnessing a death. Others have been caused by stresses within the family. And sometimes we may wonder if some people are born with a predisposition to stress and anxiety.

Of course, after stressful events, not everyone suffers as greatly. They are still able to eat and sleep. There are people around who help people through. And we know that the mind and body has an amazing ability to cope with incredible

events. Many may be anxious in these times. But history – with its accounts of various disasters and wars – also points to the incredible capacity of the human spirit.

But there are times in life when we may experience a ‘restless of the soul’. We may see three dimensions to this. On the greater side is that restlessness that does require professional assistance and help. Even faithful Christian people may experience this, and anyone who seeks to deny this seeks to deny something of the realities of this life. There are also the stress and restlessness that many people face after traumatic events, or the day-to-day grind of life. It’s not a case of mental illness, but doggone tiredness. And finally, there are those who have a restlessness within which they can never really seek to identify, and in many of these cases all the external circumstances may say otherwise. Life may be good and prosperous. Life seems ‘happy and well’. But deep down there is a real yearning in the soul.

What is it that gives us a sense of ‘peace’ in life?

In our Bible Reading this day, the Apostle Paul speaks of ‘peace’. Here he speaks not only of the external circumstances of life that might cause us restlessness. Yes, we experience sufferings and difficulties in this world (see also Romans 8:35-36, etc). But there is a deeper dimension to the peace that he speaks of in Romans 5:1.

The Apostle Paul (inspired by the Holy Spirit) reminds us that ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23). The result of this inborn sin is that such ‘sin’ breeds quarrel between us and God, and it creates not only a ‘strangeness’ and detachment from God, but also a sense of ‘restlessness’. There is a deeper lack of an abiding peace – either in terms of our daily lives, or our thoughts about the future. But, Paul says, “Therefore, since we have been justified (that is ‘put right’ with God) we have *peace* with God.”

The idea of “peace” here comes from the Old Testament word for “peace”, namely, “shalom.” This word refers to more than just the mere absence of troubles of this life. It is more than having enough material things to sustain a person in life. And it is more than having some vague inner personal sense of ‘peace’ within one’s ‘self’. This is ‘the peace’ that is founded on ‘justification’ (being in a ‘right relationship’ with God) which we receive when we trust in Jesus. This means we can stand confidently in life, knowing God’s grace toward us—a grace he made available through Jesus Christ.

And what is the result of this new-found ‘peace’? Paul says that we can even ‘rejoice in our suffering’. This ‘joy’ is not the ‘stiff upper lip’ of battling through life. Nor is this some form of masochistic or sadistic view of suffering – of almost looking forward to some sense of pain to give us some weird sense of ‘happiness’. Rather, this is the ‘suffering’ of the ‘death of self’ and knowing the gift of true life we have through the suffering, death, *and* resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In all this we always need to have a proper view of any 'suffering' we may think we are experiencing in this life, and this view can be compared to placing objects in the sun. Ice melts and then warms up, clay hardens. It becomes like stone. We must allow, suffering to soften, not harden, our hearts. We need to let suffering fire up our souls, not freeze them. For, as St. Paul also says (Romans 8:28-29) *we know* that in *all things* (not just *some*, as if God were *almost* God) that He works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. And His purpose is to conform us to the image of his Son.

Christ suffered, and through His suffering and death He has brought out new life for us all. There is always hope. There is always joy. There is always peace. Even in the bleakest of situations, there is always hope for the Christian.

But in a fallen world, there are times when it *feels* like there just isn't any hope. Someone has once said, "We can live for 40 days without food, 8 days without water, 4 minutes without air, but only a few seconds without hope." But the *truth* of the matter for the *Christian* is that there is hope because our God is the author of *continual* hope. He is the one who constantly, all throughout our lives, develops hope in us all.

At this point we may consider three groups of people. The first is the Israelites travelling through the wilderness whom we have heard about today (Exodus 17:1-7). After seeing God's great deliverance of them from Egypt with the 10 Plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, and the providence of the manna and quail (food every day – supplied by God) – and yet they still complained when they were thirsty. After arriving at Mt. Sinai they grumbled. Instead of being positive they were pessimistic. How often can we be like this? Even after seeing great things God has done for us in Jesus we may grumble and complain...

Consider also the woman at the well (our Gospel for today: John 4). She wasn't grumbling or complaining. She knew she had made certain choices in life that had put her on the edge of society. And when she met Jesus, and Jesus spoke of new 'hope' that could spring from within (the 'living water'), she recognised her need. And as Jesus spoke with her, the result was that her hearts was lifted. Indeed, so great was this change within that she went away and eagerly told other people about Jesus. And the greater result of all this is that she experienced another sense of 'peace'. She was connected to God and reconnected to other people.

Finally, let us also consider Jesus on the cross. That's what this whole season of Lent is all about – Jesus dying on the cross. And who would think there would be any hope for humanity with a man being put to death on a tree? Who would think there could be any hope in a horrible death like His? And yet through this God *has* worked salvation for *all people*.

Can we have 'peace' in life? The emphatic answer is 'Yes!' But such 'peace' does not come from the 'power of positive thinking' philosophy. Yes, in some sense this may help us get through this life. But there is a deeper sense of peace that God gives us in Jesus. This is the 'peace' that God gives that is characterised by His peace toward us in Jesus.

Through Jesus our Saviour we have a new sense of 'peace' that gives us hope and strength to walk through every day – for our relationship with God is one characterised by His peace toward us in Jesus. It was God's love for all people that saw Jesus suffer and die on the cross to save us from the consequences of sin. And it is His love in Jesus that prompts our thanks and praise – and sense of peace – today.

And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.