

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Who Jesus is: Prince of Peace

### Peace in the midst of storms

There was once a competition for artists. The task was to draw a picture which expressed peace. All the paintings were put in an exhibition. There were lots scenes of mountains and lakes, dawn skies and waves gently breaking on quiet shores. But the winning painting was a surprise. From the distance you could see dark stormy clouds, and a large tree buffeted by the wind and lashed by torrential rain. As you got closer you could see amongst the branches of the tree a bird's nest. And, in the nest, a bird was nestling over its young chicks. In the midst of the storm the tiny family was at peace in the great tree which sheltered them. The artist had expressed something we often fail to understand, that peace can be known even when everything around us is all but peaceful. And, the artist also understood that peace has to do with where we place our trust. The bird saw in the great tree a place of safety from all the dangers of life. We also see in the painting an illustration of the security the Christian has. We have come to shelter by faith, not in a tree, but in One who hung upon a tree to bear the storm of God's judgement against sin to ensure we could have peace with God. And, more than this, that we could know the peace of God in our hearts. Our place is not endangered by outward circumstances nor simply a place of shelter. But a Person - the One Isaiah called the Prince of Peace. *"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end."* (Isaiah 9:6-7a).

### The Prince of Peace

To get a sense of the greatness of the peace we have been promised by Jesus it is helpful to trace the way peace was expressed in the life of Christ. Isaiah promised a Child who would be called the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). This is very important because it establishes that peace is brought to us by the coming of God into the world as a child and this unique coming was promised centuries before His birth.

### Christ's incarnation promised God's peace

Luke is the Gospel writer who, when Jesus was born, recorded the announcement from heaven by the angels, *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men"* (Luke 2:14). In Luke 2:29-30, Luke also writes of the experience of God's old servant Simeon who, holding Christ as a tiny child in his arms, said, *"Lord, You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word: For my eyes have seen Your salvation."* The incarnation of Christ immediately promises God's peace on earth and its experience in the hearts of those who live close to Him.

### Christ's life - a ministry of peace

The life of Christ can also be seen as a ministry of peace. First in creation. In Mark 4:35-41 we have the story of Christ falling asleep in the boat after a long hard day's work amongst the many people who had come to Him for blessing. Carried exhausted by His disciples into the boat, He fell asleep. It has always amazed me that *"the [God] of Israel who neither slumbers nor sleeps"* (Psalm 121:4) could come to earth as a Man and experience physical exhaustion and the blessing of sleep. Christ was truly man. But He was always God. Awaken from sleep by the terrified disciples *"[Jesus] rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm"* (Mark 4:39).

This is one of the most telling stories of the peace of God. The disciples saw the waves and wanted, more than anything else, the storm to cease. Just like us, they wanted the Lord to take away the circumstances and so give them peace. The Lord did this but adds *"Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"* (Mark 4:40). The lesson was a simple one: whilst the disciples were in the boat with the Lord they were safe. Peter had a personal experience of this when he walked on the water but, taking his eyes off the Lord, he began to sink (Matthew 14:22-32). Faith is linked to peace. Faith in the Lord gives peace in spite of the circumstances which rage around us. This is the peace He wants us to know in our daily lives - a peace which passes all understanding (see Philippians 4:7).

In the following chapter of Mark's Gospel Jesus heals the diseased woman saying to her, "*Daughter, your faith has made you whole; go in peace*" (Mark 5:34). Faith again is linked to peace. Just before going to the cross, the Lord adds another dimension to peace when He says in John 14:27, "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*"

There are many occasions when the Lord Jesus uses the word "my." It describes not only what belongs to Him, for example, "*My sheep*" (John 10:14) but the quality and uniqueness of what He gives and what He promises, "*My Body*, (Matthew 26:12, 26; Mark 14:8, 22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24), *My Blood* (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; John 6:54-56, 1 Corinthians 11:25), *My Peace* (John 14:27)." These are things which no one else can give. They are unique to Christ and His people. He compares His peace to the peace the world gives. In the world peace is a most elusive and fragile thing. Whether it is peace in our lives, in our relationships, in our communities, nationally or internationally peace is so frighteningly uncertain. It is a peace dependent on outward circumstance rather than inner certainty.

### **Peace in suffering**

In His sufferings the Lord Jesus expresses peace as He faced all the things we most fear. We fear injustice and corruption. Jesus experienced both these things at His trial. Yet before the High Priest, Herod, Pilate and the people, His calmness shines amidst the rage, hatred, mockery and inhumanity He endured. But it is the cross where we see the majesty of the Prince of Peace. He prayed for forgiveness for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34); He ensured His mother would be cared for after His departure (John 19:25-27). He answered the need of the dying thief, "*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom with words of peace, 'Assuredly I say unto you, Today shall you be with Me in paradise.'*" (Luke 23:43). The word for paradise is closely associated with the Persian gardens which were synonymous with tranquillity and peacefulness. But It was not simply that the thief would be in paradise but that he would be with Christ in paradise. The place is characterised by the person.

### **Peace and the resurrection**

This theme of peace is continued in the resurrection of Christ. In John 20:19 we read, "*Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, Peace be with you.*" Whether it was Thomas (John 20:24-29), Peter, the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-49) or the gathered company of disciples (John 19:20-23) the common message of the risen Christ was peace. Christ enters the world as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) and from His incarnation to His resurrection He ministered peace to hearts of all those who trusted Him.

### **Breaking down barriers**

When we come to the letters of the Apostle Paul, we begin to further understand the peace which Christ has given. We are no longer Jews or Gentiles but the church of God - one people. "*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances; so as to create in Himself one new man from two, thus making peace ... And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to those who were near.*" (Ephesians 2:14-17). The peace Jesus has given not only draws us closer to God but to each other by breaking down the barriers which divide people and making the "one flock" of which Christ is the "one Shepherd" (see John 10:16).

### **The Lord of peace**

If the Lord Jesus came to earth as the Prince of Peace, He also reigns in heaven as the Lord of peace. "*Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all*" (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

In Hebrews the Old Testament character of Melchizedek is used to describe the greatness of Christ as our High Priest and in doing so us gives Him the title King of Peace. "*Melchizedek ... to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being translated King of righteousness, and then also King of Salem, meaning, King of peace*" (Hebrews 7:1-2). We see then, Christ as Prince, Lord and King of Peace. These titles remind us of Christ in His life and death as the Prince of Peace, in resurrection as the Lord of Peace and head of His Church and then, as our present High Priest in Heaven, the King of Peace.

### **Peace with God**

But we also have to understand that Christ has given peace in relation to God Himself. This can be seen in several ways. First of all peace with God. This is the starting point. Since the Fall (Genesis 3:1-7), man has been at enmity with God and in need of reconciliation (see 2 Corinthians 5:18-19). This was what Christ came into the world to do. At the cross Christ answered all the righteousness of God against sin. He paid the price with His own life and blood. He

took our place, being judged so that we would not be. We now have peace with God through the Lord Jesus. In the words of Romans 5:1, *“Therefore having being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* When you come to Christ in simple faith believing that He died for you, you have peace with God. We all know what it is like to be reconciled with friends when those things which damaged our relationships are and put behind us and peace between friends is restored. God has given His own Son so that we could be reconciled to Him and be at peace with Him.

### **The God of peace**

Having been brought to know peace with God we can then know the God of peace. At the end of Romans Paul writes, *“Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen”* (Romans 15:33).

But how do we know the God of peace? Here faith and discipleship are important. In Philippians 4:9 Paul writes, *“Those things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”* The emphasis is on the God of peace being with us as a result of obedient Christian lives. Paul also promises victory over the power of Satan in Romans 16:20, *“the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”* This is a very illuminating verse because it links the power of God with the God of Peace. In the Psalms are we reminded to *“be still and know that I am God”* (Psalm 46:10). Knowing God brings both peace and power to our lives. God wants to make us into a people characterised by peace. Paul clearly teaches this in 1 Corinthians 14:33, *“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”* The word, confusion, here means literally “unquietness.” Sometimes as Christians we are more marked by confusion and noisiness than the gentleness of Christ. Knowing the God of peace not only gives us a quietness and gentleness of spirit but has a sanctifying effect on our whole being, *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

I said earlier that the resurrection of Christ was characterised by the peace which He brought to the disciples He loved. The resurrection is more fully explained in New Testament epistles where we see it linked to the God of peace, *“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”* (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Here we see two very important issues in relation to the God of peace. First, it was the God of peace who raised from the dead the Lord Jesus. Christ, the Prince of Peace, did the work of redemption. God, whose righteousness has been met in Christ's death, raises His son in the character of the God of Peace. It is striking that immediately upon the death of Christ at Calvary the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. That great curtain which separated God and man was instantaneously removed when the Prince of Peace died. It is the God of Peace who acts in resurrection to show that He has come out to meet our need on the basis of His grace in Christ.

The second aspect of this verse is about the present work of God. It is again the God of peace who is working in me and you to do His will. By His Spirit He works out His purposes in our lives. This life is one which is filled with joy and peace, *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 15:13).

### **The peace of God**

So, through the Lord Jesus, we know peace with God and the God of peace. But the promise of His peace goes further. We can also know the peace of God. Paul again writes of this at length in Philippians, *“Rejoice in the Lord always, Again I will say, Rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in every thing 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 minds through Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:4-7).

It is clear from these verses that knowing the peace of God is very much linked to the way we live our lives for God. Nothing can take away our peace with God once we are saved. That peace is settled forever. And, of course, the God of peace never leaves us. But we can live our lives not enjoying the peace of God. This peace is only experienced as we live close to the Lord and in harmony with His word. It is a peace which passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). The peace which Christ knew at the cross. A peace which could never be disturbed by any circumstance, pain or difficulty. To know and enjoy it we have to be prepared to let it rule in our hearts. *“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful”* (Colossians 3:15).

The idea of Prince, Lord, King and, of course, God all have to do with authority and rule. Yet the Apostle impresses on us that God wants us to willingly submit to the wonderful rule of peace in our hearts. The example of Mary and Martha

is helpful here (Luke 10:38-42). Martha, when we first meet her, was too anxious to be peaceful - does she remind you of anyone? She reminds me of myself. Mary was too peaceful to be anxious. The difference was the relationship to the Prince of Peace. One was rushing about; the other sat still. In today's world we are often robbed of the peace of God because we rush endlessly around trying to fit so much in but neglecting to make time for the one thing Jesus said "was needful" - to be in His presence. Of course we excuse ourselves by saying we just do not have time to be quiet. But so often we make time for TV, sport and things we really want to do. If we really wanted to be in God's presence and let the peace of God rule in our hearts we would make time. God's solutions for our lives are always simple. Our excuses are always complicated.

### Peace with one another

We have the opportunity to know the peace of God and this not only rests in us as individual Christians but as the people of God. Paul often reminded his readers of this, *"To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 1:7). It is God's desire that His people enjoy His peace and live in peace with one with another.

*"Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you"* (2 Corinthians 13:11).

It helps if we actively engage in doing things which promote peace amongst us. *"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace, and things by which one may edify another"* (Romans 14:19).

But, of course, this demands of us a spiritual mind. The great choice for Christians today is whether we live for ourselves or for our Lord. *"For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace"* (Romans 8:6). Such a life does not put our salvation at risk but it certainly demonstrates an ungrateful heart towards the Saviour who gave all for us.

We must not forget the work and fruit of the Spirit. Peace is one of the wonderful characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. We have seen the peace which pervaded the life of Christ. It is the Spirit who enables us to enjoy and transmit this peace in our lives. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace..."* (Galatians 5:22). Linked to this is the Gospel of peace which we preach. The Gospel is always most effective when it is preached by those whose lives demonstrate its power. *"And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those that preach the Gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!'"* (Romans 10:15); and *"having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace"* (Ephesians 6:15). Alongside this we also demonstrate the Kingdom of God, *"for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 14:17).

### As the people of God

- It is our responsibility to endeavour *"to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:3).
- We are to seek peace, *"Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it"* (1 Peter 3:11).
- We are to follow peace, *"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord"* (Hebrews 12:14).
- We are to seek the wisdom from above, *"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those that make peace"* (James 3:17-18).
- And finally we are to be peacemakers, *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God"* (Matthew 5:9).

The Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace, has brought us to know peace with God, the God of Peace and the peace of God. He has promised us His own peace which passes understanding and which is experienced by being in the current of God's will as Jesus was. And He has made us into a people of peace from whose lives the joy, power, wisdom and healing of peace are to be a witness to this world. Contentment in a world of discontent.

It's time to let the Prince of Peace rule in our hearts!

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