

Guest Preacher - Rev. James Maciver

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Now if you please turn with me to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3. Tonight we're going to consider the words you find in verse 16. 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 16 particularly.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all. It just takes a glance out over the world tonight to realize that one of the great needs of the day is peace.

We live in a world blighted by war, by terrorism, by persecution, by people having to leave their country for one reason or another and seeking refuge elsewhere.

People who are longing for peace, nations longing for peace, individuals praying for peace. And then we bring it home to ourselves.

And as individuals and as communities, we too need peace. Peace is one of the most important and treasured possessions that we have.

[1 : 1 2] We need that peace deep in our own hearts. We cannot commend that peace unless we know it for ourselves to begin with. And when we turn to the Bible and when we turn to the likes of a verse like this, where the Lord is the subject really of Paul's thoughts that the Lord would give peace to these people in Thessalonica, to His people there.

What does peace mean in the teaching of the Bible? Well, as you go through the Bible's use of peace and its meaning, you very soon discover that peace in that sense, in the biblical sense, is much more than the absence or the removal of strife.

That indeed is a part of it. That's a precious part of it. But the Bible doesn't mean by peace just the absence or the laying down of conflict or coming to be reconciled to each other if we have actually fallen out.

No, the Lord, in His definition of peace and in His explanation of what peace means, has given us especially to see in Christ and what He has done and what He is doing, that the peace we need is spiritual peace.

Peace first and foremost with God, and then peace with one another and with other people. So the peace of which the Bible speaks and of which Paul frequently speaks is really, in many ways, the well-being that we require, the spiritual prosperity that we lack of ourselves, the spiritual prosperity that we need in Christ, that is found for us in Christ, the spiritual equilibrium or balance or that foundation to life, if you like, that we find in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3 : 0 8] And which is why Paul is finishing this letter, the second letter to the Thessalonians, with this particular request of God and this revelation to the Thessalonians, that this is in fact what He wishes for them.

That the Lord of peace Himself may give you peace at all times. So peace is, in many ways, one of the highest blessings and privileges that we receive from God.

And as people on this island, we have come to know the peace that comes through the gospel over many generations. I'm not saying that where the gospel is, that there's always peace or perfect peace.

It's obviously not the case. But where you remove the gospel, there's far less likelihood of having a true and lasting peace between people and certainly between people and God.

And here is what Paul is saying for us tonight. We have a peace that's commended to us. And in that prayer of God, that prayer of Paul to God, he is, first of all, referring to the source of peace.

[4 : 26] Where he says, May the Lord Himself give you peace at all times. And along with the source of peace, he comes to speak of the sharing of peace.

Because as we'll see, it's important that we recognize that the word you, twice used in the verse, is a plural. He's not just saying, May the Lord give you peace as individuals.

He's saying, May you share this peace. May you know this peace among yourselves. May this peace be something that characterizes you as a fellowship, as a church of God's people.

That's really what he's saying to them. The source of peace, as we'll see, is Jesus. And the sharing of peace. As God's people experience and benefit from it.

As they share in it together. Well, you notice what he's saying about the source of peace. Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times, in every way.

[5 : 29] It's fascinating how Paul sometimes speaks about the peace of God as something that comes directly from God the Father. Or God the Father is the source of it.

You go to the likes of Colossians. In chapter 1, there in Colossians. And at verse 20, the apostle is saying that it pleased God the Father.

That all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Christ. Why was that? Why did it please God to have all the fullness of God abide or dwell in Jesus Christ, His Son, and especially in His Son incarnate?

Which is what He's actually saying down through the passage. Well, it's so that through Him, God the Father might reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

And you who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, has He now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death.

[6 : 36] In other words, he's reminding the Colossians, it's the God of peace that has created peace, who has created peace through Christ Jesus, through the blood of the cross especially, making peace.

Not only making peace between people together, but between people and God. Making peace between the people of God and God, between sinners and God.

Where God creates that peace in their hearts. Which is why you find there in Colossians the word reconciliation, or reconcile. Through Him to reconcile to Himself all things.

Because that's really at the very kernel of peace, isn't it? The peace that we need between ourselves and God comes through the death of Christ on the cross, who has borne the penalty that we ourselves deserved for our sins.

And now through that work of the cross, peace comes to His people. Reconciliation between God and sinners.

[7 : 37] And the fruit of that reconciliation is to know the peace of God, the peace that comes between ourselves and God, as God imparts that to us.

So that's usually how Paul speaks about the peace of God. That is a peace that comes from the Father, through Christ. Now this is not a contradiction in 2 Thessalonians, because now he's saying, may the Lord of peace Himself give you this.

And when he speaks about the Lord, most often, if not always, Paul is being very precise about who that is. It's not God the Father now, though He is, as we saw, the source of peace too.

But here, Jesus Himself, the Lord, the Lord Jesus, is the one that He is setting before the Thessalonians as the giver of this peace.

Now may the Lord of peace Himself, because He is the bestower of peace. This Jesus, as much as the Father, gives peace.

[8 : 45] And He gives peace as the fruit of all that He has done by His death on the cross. That's the foundation of our peace.

The peace that we require. You remember how He spoke to the disciples shortly before His own death, when He was in the upper room, in John chapter 14.

And how He specifically mentioned there how He was giving them this legacy of peace. The peace that would be the result of what He was going to do by His death on the cross.

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 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. Not as the world gives do I give. There is a peace that the world extends to you. And here's the question for myself and for yourself tonight.

[9 : 47] The peace that we need for our souls, where are we looking for it? Where are we hoping to find it? Are we going to find it in the world? Are we going to find it in the ways of the world?

There was a day when I personally, like many of yourselves, thought that peace was just being at peace with the world. And not actually heeding the voice of God through the Scriptures, through the Gospel, through the testimony of His people.

The peace of which we really said when we were in that condition said, Well, I'm quite happy the way I am. I have peace with the way I am. I'm not troubled about the way I am.

So that's my peace. And isn't that enough for me? Well, of course, we learned after God came into our lives powerfully and demonstrated to us that that peace we thought was peace was the flimsiest thing in the world.

It didn't take much to disturb it. It's not the peace that Jesus was speaking of when He said, My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give.

[10 : 52] Do you know this peace tonight? It's not a feeling. Though there may be feelings involved in it. Not an emotion, though there may be emotions rightly involved in it as well.

Now this peace is something that has to do with a relationship with God. A state in which God places you. A state in which you have come to be at peace with Him.

In which you know that He has dealt with your sin by the death of Jesus on the cross. A peace that has come to you because you have accepted Him and received Him as He's offered to you in the gospel.

He is our peace. And if He is not our Savior, then He's not our peace. And if we don't have Him tonight as our Savior, we don't have this peace.

Whatever we may persuade ourselves, peace is. It's not the peace of the gospel unless it's peace through knowing Jesus Christ. May the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times.

[12 : 05] And just as it said, as Paul actually said, or as Jesus said rather in that chapter in John in the upper room, Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

The world's full of troubles, isn't it? Our life is full of troubles. Where do we take our troubles? To whom do we take our troubles?

Are we looking for a solution to the difficulties of life in the ways of the world? Well, there's no peace there for us. We need to leave that and come to Jesus.

And in coming to Jesus to know this peace. Where God is with us. Where God is foundational. Where God is central.

Where God is put first and foremost in all our doings. Remember, Jacob, Genesis chapter 46.

[13 : 08] He had to go back to Egypt. And there were many things that would make Jacob at that point somewhat afraid. Somewhat tremulous in thinking of going down to Egypt of all places at this stage in his life.

And God met him and God said to him, Don't be afraid to go down into Egypt. For there I will make you a great nation.

And I myself will go down with you. And I will take you up again. Now these are words which, of course, were through literally of Jacob. And Jacob in his circumstances at that time.

And applied particularly to himself. But you can take these words tonight. And you can take these words tonight. Of whatever it is maybe in front of you. Even though at this time you may not know what it is.

But don't be afraid. With God on your side. With his peace in your heart. And as God said to Jacob. I myself will go with you.

[14 : 09] And I won't leave you there. I'll take you back up again. God's not going to leave you in the turmoil of anxieties.

Of temptations. Of afflictions. Our life may be full of these. That's in God's hands. But the peace of God is not disturbed.

It's not displaced. It's not nullified. By the things of providence. The things of the world. As you can see if you go down to.

I go down every morning now since I retired. I can go down every morning to the shore and tongue. Spend some time walking there. With a dog. And there's a great rock there.

Just as you go down to the shore. Near where I now live. And that great rock is there every single morning as you go down. Sometimes the sea is right up against it. Sometimes the sea almost covers it.

[15 : 12] Other times you go down. The tide's gone all the way out. And the rock is standing there on its own. But it doesn't matter whether the tide has come in. Or whether the tide has gone all the way out. That rock is the same.

Every single day you look at it. It's not the rock that moves. It's the tide that goes back and forth. That ebbs and flows. And that's how it is with life.

Jesus as you walk does not, will not move. The tides may move. Maybe different tides today to compare to what it was recently or tomorrow.

But remember the rock doesn't move. And the peace of God is in that rock who is Jesus. May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times.

And you see, it's so different to the way that the world looks for peace in material ways. Looking for peace by the accumulation of wealth.

[16 : 15] Looking for peace by prestige. Looking for peace by positions of power. Looking for peace by the kudos of the world. By having the world's approval. By having people say, isn't he or isn't she a great person?

Don't they have great abilities? Aren't we fortunate to have them over us or with us or whatever? No, the Lord of peace himself gives you peace.

And he says, in all times, at all times and in every way. And when Jesus says, my peace I give to you. Well, that's the peace we need.

That's the peace that cannot be taken from us. That's the peace that's situated in the rock himself. In Jesus, the Savior.

And you see, he's reinforcing that point by using the word himself. It could have just said, now may the Lord of peace give you peace at all times.

[17 : 17] And that itself would be a powerful and dynamic statement. But he actually went further. He reinforced it by saying, now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.

The apostle is convinced 100%. This is what they need to focus their minds on. This is who they need to focus their minds on. This is where that peace is situated, where it will always be situated for them.

May the Lord of peace himself don't look for your peace or I look for my peace anywhere other than in himself, in Jesus himself.

Whoever may try to persuade you to try and manufacture some sort of peace for yourself by whatever means. However much the world may appeal to you in its clamor for peace and say, don't bother with that religious stuff.

I'll give you the peace. The Lord of peace himself is the only one who can give us that peace that we need.

[18 : 21] And it's given to us when we accept him. When by his grace we are persuaded and enabled to embrace Jesus Christ, as the catechism puts it, as he is freely offered to us in the gospel.

So tonight, peace. And peace at all times, in every way. It literally means continually and at every turn.

See, it's not just peace for specific crisis points in life. It's not just peace when we really feel we're at a low ebb or when we're really challenged hugely or suffering greatly.

And then we appeal to the Lord, Lord, please give me some peace. No, this is peace at all times and in every way.

It's peace for your everyday situations. It's peace when you're rejoicing and it's peace when you're weeping. And it's the same peace for both.

[19 : 26] The peace that Jesus gives. May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. Isn't it a sad fact that Jesus died to bring us peace and yet we sometimes refuse to have a massive peace?

Is it your peace tonight? Is it true of yourself that you know Jesus died to bring peace to his people and yet you haven't received or welcomed him as your peace with God?

Don't look anywhere else. Don't wait for a more convenient time. Don't put it off till tomorrow. Don't put it off till tomorrow. You need this peace now.

And this peace is there for you right now. It's in Jesus. Through all that he has done, he is saying, here is peace.

Peace for you. Peace fitted to your circumstances. Peace exactly as you need it. Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.

[20 : 49] And secondly, he's the source of peace, but secondly, there's a shading of peace as well. May the Lord of peace himself give you, plural, peace at all times in every way.

The Lord be with you, plural, all with you all. There is, of course, an important individual emphasis in coming to know the peace that Jesus gives.

We come to him personally for that peace. We receive him personally for that peace to be something we possess individually ourselves. We need that. But the apostle so often mentions the fellowship of God's people, the community of God's people, the communion that God's people are together in the ways that he speaks about the blessings that come from God.

What he's saying here is that this peace is actually experienced together as God's people. It's something that the Lord brings to people as they come collectively together as one people of God to share together in the blessings that come through Jesus Christ.

I think sometimes, I'm certainly guilty of it myself still to the day, to this day, that I go through reading these New Testament epistles and the epistles of Paul especially and don't really take note of this you, plural, because that's where the Lord's people together share in so much.

[22 : 18] They share in it and they share it out. They share it amongst each other. They share it out to others as well in inviting them to partake of it. It's crucial, we know, this peace personally and individually, but you know, when God brings you to know himself, he doesn't leave you somewhere there out in your own, isolated from all the others who know the peace of God.

One of the most precious things for you and for me tonight is that you belong to the church of God, that you're brought up within the circle of God's covenant people, that you have a place in a people who value the gospel, who worship God regularly as you're doing tonight, that's such a precious thing, such a wonderfully privileged position to be in, to belong to God's visible people in this world, to have the advantages and the blessings and the promises that God gives through the gospel to gospel people.

He places each and every one of us, when he comes into our lives, together with others like-minded. He brings you to be nurtured in his church, to be taught, to be sanctified by him along with other people, to be helped, to be encouraged.

You know, it's the fall of Adam and all mankind in him, part from Jesus. It's the fall of Adam that brought in such things as we nowadays refer to as selfishness and individualism.

Individualism. We will live for ourselves and where, unless the Lord changes our life, we're quite happy living for ourselves at the expense very often of other people.

[24 : 04] You look out over the world tonight, it's absolutely crammed full of individualistic ideologies. It's filled with people who think only of themselves, whatever it is they can achieve for themselves, even at the expense of their fellow human beings.

exploitation. Well, it doesn't matter. It's for my advantage. That's sin at work. That's our fallenness revealing itself. And thanks be to God, Jesus came into the world not only to reverse that, but to replace that instead of individualism and selfishness and all that's associated with that sinful way of outlook and of lifestyle.

God gives His people to enjoy peace together, to be partakers together of the things that God has for His people in His salvation, not just peace, but many other things.

So, it's really saying that it's together that we do such things as grow in the knowledge of God. It's together that we worship. It's together that we learn.

It's together that we serve the Lord. All of these things and many others, the Bible commends that we do and participate in and share together. And when we know the peace of God that comes through trusting in Christ, it's something that we share with others who know it too.

[25 : 36] And tonight, that's such a precious thing, isn't it? not only that you know the peace of God in your own heart, the peace that Jesus gives, but that you're able by God's grace to enjoy that together with others who also want to experience more of that peace.

It's experienced together. But secondly, in the sharing of peace, it requires our commitment to unity. Let me just take you back briefly to Ephesians and chapter 4 especially from the beginning of that chapter, a wonderful passage dealing with the way in which God's people are united and must value the unity that God Himself creates.

Either for a prisoner for the Lord urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And he goes on to speak about there is one body and one Spirit, different ways in which the unity of God is set out and expressed by the Apostle. But look what he's saying here.

Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And the Apostle was in prison when he wrote these words to the Ephesians. And there's no evidence anywhere that he was annoyed with God, that he couldn't be out preaching the Gospel, reaching out with the Gospel into different places as he was at other times.

[27 : 21] But surely there's just at least a suggestion or a hint that he would love to be with these other Christians instead of being locked up in prison and kept manacled in prison as he was at times.

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord. As if he's saying to them, look, value the unity you have together because here I am as a prisoner and I would love to be with you.

I would love to share with you in person the things that you have as your privileges. So here we are tonight. We're not prisoners. We're not persecuted, at least not in the way that most people are for their faith.

We're able to share together and we're able to experience the unity that God creates in bringing us together as His people whenever we are brought to know Him savingly.

He's saying, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. What's he saying? He's saying that there's such a thing as the unity of the Spirit.

[28 : 25] The unity of which the Holy Spirit is the author. The unity that the Holy Spirit creates when He creates a people that are united in Christ.

The unity that's there is His creation. We haven't created it. We haven't manufactured it. We haven't devised a way of bringing it about. It's not our wisdom that has come to produce this unity.

It's not by man's intellectual ability or by man's wisdom or any philosophies of human beings. It's through the Holy Spirit working in God's people's hearts, working in their hearts, applying Christ to them.

The unity of the Spirit. That's where it's from. It's the creation of the Spirit. But you see, while it is the creation of the Spirit, by God's help, we are required to maintain it, to look after it.

Look after the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In other words, the more you share that peace together, the more you're in a position to actually not only enjoy this unity and this peace, but also to maintain it, to look after it.

[29 : 44] Two things are bonded together, aren't they? The peace that God brings about, the peace that Jesus gives, and the unity of the Spirit. You can't really separate them. They're actually connected so closely together.

Where you have the unity of the Spirit maintained, you have the peace of God enjoyed. Where you have fractions, fractures and dissensions, the kind of things you find even in these early New Testament churches, let alone in time all the way since then to the present day.

It's really drawing apart, isn't it? Separating off two things that God has cemented together, as intended we keep together, the unity of the Spirit and the peace of God.

And you're privileged tonight to have both of these as a people, something that we know ourselves and value, the peace of God, peace from Jesus, and the unity of the Spirit, which we are required to maintain in peace, in harmony, in fellowship.

And that's why he speaks here about, in that passage in Ephesians. I'll go back to it a minute, for a minute. That's why he speaks in verse 2 there, walk worthy of the calling with which you've been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bathing with one another in love.

[31 : 22] You see, he's saying that this is essential to maintain the unity, to avoid the factions, to avoid the divisions, to maintain the unity of the Spirit, bathing with one another in love, in all humility, and gentleness, with patience.

All of that is combined in one wonderful set of doctrines that just form this marvelous passage in Ephesians on the unity and the peace of God's people.

And here he is in Thessalonians, now may the Lord of peace himself give you together, you personally and you together, peace at all times in every way. And it involves our commitment to this peace, to this unity that the Spirit creates.

And finally, the sharing of peace, not only experienced together, and not only is it something that requires our commitment to unity, but it also involves the presence of God, the presence of Jesus.

The Lord be with you all. the same personal Lord that he's spoken of in the early part of the verse. The Lord of peace, may the Lord be with you all.

[32 : 42] That is the peace Paul sought for the Thessalonians. And you go back again to the passage we mentioned in Genesis 46, where Jacob is counseled by God not to be afraid to go into Egypt.

I will make you there a great nation. What people might least expect to happen in such a hostile environment is what God brings about. How could you possibly have a nation created, a great nation, a powerful nation, in such circumstances as these?

Well, God brought it about. God ensured it happened. That's why he said to Jacob, there I will make you a great nation. You apply that, as we said earlier, to our circumstances in this world, to sufferings and trials and afflictions, because that's where God is often at work, creating, shaping, fashioning, bringing together, teaching, molding.

But this is what Paul sought, the Lord be with you all. That's what Jacob was assured of by God. Don't be afraid to go there.

I myself will go with you. What wonderful words, really, in many ways, in excess of much else that had been revealed at that time in the Old Testament days. I myself will go with you.

[34 : 09] I won't just send, I'm not going to send an angel. I'm not going to send even the archangels. I'm not going to send one of the chiefest of heaven. I myself will go with you. No, when God says to anybody, I'm going to be with you, what's really going to make us afraid?

Why should we doubt? Why should we think that we can't enjoy the Lord's peace even when we are at times afflicted, ridiculed, whatever, for our faith?

The Lord be with you all. And for yourselves as a people under your present minister and his teaching, this is what we seek for you as well.

This is what we seek for all our congregations, that the Lord of peace himself will give you peace at all times in every way. Like everything that comes from the Lord, it will be tested.

And you will be tested with it. And I will be tested with it. And we'll be tested individually, we'll be tested as a corporate body of people as we have been all the way through time.

We pray that God will bless these thoughts on his word. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord, we give thanks tonight that your peace is so real to your people, a peace that is lasting and founded on no other than on the Lord himself.

We bless you tonight that that is the ground of our hope and of our peace. We pray that we may look to you at all times, O Lord, for the peace that our soul requires.

And may every home connected to the congregation know this peace for themselves, and may this be a community that knows of greater peace, each and every day from the Lord himself through the gospel.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you, now and evermore. Amen.