



The beauty of Jesus

Galatians 5:22-23

Fruit of the Spirit - Peace

Sunday, October 27th

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An example of stirring up discord

On Sunday mornings we are making our way, through the nine “fruit of the Spirit” which are “... *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*” (Galatians 5:22-23) These nine character traits supernaturally begin to form in the life of a follower of Jesus, as a result of God the Holy Spirit living and working in their hearts, year by year, decade by decade. Today, we focus on “peace” - peace with God, peace with our fellow man, and peace in our hearts.

Prince Harry recently gave a TV interview in which he hinted that there were tensions between him and his brother, William. He said something like “we’re on different paths.” Tensions between brothers and sisters is not unusual. What brothers or sisters get on with each other all of the time? The uneasiness between the brothers isn’t what surprised me—they’ll sort things out I am sure—it was how Harry and the press handled it. If Harry and the media had been led by peace, led by Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, what would they have done?

Well, Prince Harry shouldn’t have told the world about his upset with William. The Jesus-response to being out of sorts with someone is to tell no-one else, but speak to that person alone, “*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his faulty, just between the two of you.*” (Matthew 18:15) Not a single soul on the planet should have heard about it! Why? To limit the damage, to put out the flame, to sue for peace. Harry made a mistake, and I say that kindly, because we can all make mistakes.

The far bigger mistake was made by the press, and their mistake goes by the ugly name of gossip. When the news editor in charge of that video tape heard Harry say “We’re on different paths” they should have thought something like this: “*Harry’s under a lot of strain at the moment. The role the press played in the death of his mother is raw in his mind, we can see the strain in his face, let’s protect the Prince, and edit out his comment, erase it from the hard-drive and tell no-one about it.*” That would be “the path of peace.” Instead, what did they do? That little video clip about “different paths” was gossiped around the world, pouring fuel on the fire, so that by the middle of the week, the BBC was reporting that the princes may never speak to each other again: “*Princes Harry and William: ‘An irreparably changed relationship’*”.

Harry may have been wrong in revealing the tensions with his brother, but the greater blame surely lies with the media for spreading “tittle-tattle” and gossip. I really felt for Marry and Megan this week, and though I have never done this before in my life, I wrote to them at Clarence House London, to encourage them and to assure them of my prayers. I ended with 1 Timothy 2:2, “*Pray for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceable and quiet lives in all goodness and holiness...*” I’ll let you know if I get one of those posh letters back - and I’ll even let you have a look at it, for a small sum.

According to the Bible, there are three kinds of peace, which I want to share with you this morning. There is Peace with God, Peace with people and Peace in our hearts.

PEACE #1
The Peace that God has Made through Jesus

You and I can never really experience Peace 2 and Peace 3, Peace with others, and Peace in our hearts, until we first know Peace with God.

It may surprise someone here this morning to hear that all human beings are “natural-born-enemies” of God! When children are little they easily and naturally believe in God. From the elaborate complexity of the natural world of animals, planets, stars, around them, they work out that there must be a God. In his book, *“Born Believers, The science of Children’s Religious Belief”*, the American Psychologist, Justin Barrett, says, *“children naturally develop minds that encourage them to embrace belief in the god or gods of their culture. People may practically be born believers... Children’s minds are naturally tuned up to believe in gods generally, and perhaps God in particular.”* (pages 3 & 4). But when we reach the age of independent thought, the point where we want to choose the way we live, we discover that we don’t want to follow God’s ways or the guidelines in our consciences, and we turn away from God.

We move away from God thinking we don’t need him, and God separates from us because a Holy and Pure God cannot be friends with wilfully disobedient sinners. *“Once”* (Paul says to Christians) *you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.”* (Colossians 1:21) Everyone in the world finds themselves alienated from God, and if we remain in that condition when we die, the Bible says that God the righteous Judge, will have to punish us for our rebellion and wrongdoing in a place the Bible calls Hell, a place prepared for the Devil and his angels. A *“place of eternal fire”* (Matt 25:41), *“a blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matt 13:5), a place of *“eternal Punishment”* (Matt 25:46), *“where the fire never goes out”* (Mark 9:43). A place of *“everlasting destruction”* (2 Thess 1:9), and a *“fiery lake of burning sulphur.”* (Rev 19:20)

But, God who is holy and just, is also loving and merciful. He doesn't want anyone to perish and takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (2 Pet 3:9). And so the God of Peace, acted in history to reconcile men and women to himself, to bring us back to himself, to make peace between himself and us. And the way he accomplished this great reconciliation was to send his pure and sinless beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to pay for our sin, to take the rap for the wrong that we have done, to be punished in our place. *“Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”* (1 Peter 3:18) *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* (2 Cor 5:21)

Christians wear crosses and glory in the cross, because it was through the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross that the God of Peace reconciled us to himself, and go to heaven. We sing joyfully,

*Behold the man upon a cross
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers*

*It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished*

If the hell we deserve is worse than we can imagine, the heaven Jesus secured for all who believe in him is more wonderful than we could ever dream! It will be a place of eternal security and safety, *“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.”* (Rev 7:16) It’s a world of joy: *“you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”* (Psalm 16:11). A place where we will be free from all sorrow: *“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.”* (Rev 21:4)

You and I can know Peace with God by believing this message, that through the death of Jesus our wrong doing was paid for and forgiven in full. You can believe this message today, this very hour, and know for sure in your heart that you have peace with God. And if you already believe, be assured that nothing can undo that peace: *“Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1) Jesus was “pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isiah 53:5)*

Peace #2

The Peace that God calls us to work for in the world

If Peace with God is our treasured possession, it will lead very naturally to Peace #2, the peace that God calls us to work for in our marriages, in our family life, in our neighbourhoods, in our places of work and in the church. In other words, a believer becomes like the God they worship. *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)*. Here's the rule, *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, (sometimes someone won't live at peace with you, that's not your problem) live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18)*. There are three universal principles of peace, whether we are talking about homes, workplaces or the church.

(i) Know your place. So much strife is caused in the home or in the workplace when people refuse to acknowledge their God-given place. Christian children, recognise that you are under your parents, employees acknowledge that you are under your boss. Drivers recognise that traffic wardens are above you. “Order” and “peace” go together.

(ii) Watch your speech and actions. Say or do nothing that would in any way disturb the peace. We avoid all gossip because we know gossip divides: *“gossip separates close friends.” (Pr. 16:28)* Not only must we watch our word we must also watch our actions.

A few weeks ago, Mike, our assistant pastor, was leading morning worship, and you may remember that he kept the kids in for communion so that they could watch what happens and understand why we eat from a loaf of bread and drink little cups of grape juice. Well, at the end of communion we have a little tradition of covering the communion table with a cloth, it's so that none of us will be distracted by half-eaten loaves of bread! Well Mike didn't put the cloth back on, because he didn't know where it was. This was no big issue, it's only a man-made tradition. I noticed he'd forgotten and I saw where the cloth was, but I deliberately did not put it on. Why? Because I didn't want anyone to think that I was criticising Mike—I was “making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit.” Someone says, “That's over the Top”, I say, “Not at all; it is making EVERY effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit.”

Peacemakers keep to their place, peacemakers, watch their talk, and thirdly peacemakers

(iii) Avoid divisive people. *“I urge you brothers to watch out for those who cause divisions... keep away from them.” (Romans 16:17)*. Did you know that there is something wrong with someone who causes division between people? Listen to God's Word: *“A perverse person stirs up conflict” (Proverbs 16:28) “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” (Titus 3:10-11)*. When you are in the coffee hall after morning worship, for example, drinking coffee from your eco-cups, if someone ever comes up to you and says anything that would divide one person for another, keep away from them, avoid them, because they are twisted! *“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Romans 14:19) “Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit” (Eph.4:3)*

Is there a situation at work, home, where you could be a channel of God's peace, this week?

Peace #3

The peace that God wants us to experience in our hearts

Peace with God, vertical peace, leads to peace with one another, horizontal peace, and finally, peace in our hearts, internal peace, inward peace. This kind of peace is the opposite of worry, it is peace instead of anxiety, peace in the place of turmoil. God wants to give his people peaceful hearts, no matter what storms they pass through. *“The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6) “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you,*

because they trust in you.” (Isaiah 26:3) “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)

Peter was imprisoned for preaching the Gospel and was awaiting public trial. But he’s sound asleep between two soldiers, Acts 12? How can you fall asleep soundly when your life is under threat? God’s Peace. Paul and Silas have been severely flogged because they were preaching the Gospel, (Acts 16) then they are thrown into prison, but they break out into hymns and prayers! How do you do that? God’s Peace! Someone said to me this week that in their place of work, they are known to be calm when everyone around them is flapping! How come? Divine Peace!

How do we get this sort of internal peace? We pray, spicing up our prayers with thanksgiving: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God.”* And look what God promises: *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:6-7)*

In November 1873 the steam ship *Ville de Havre* sank on her return from America to France. She collided with a large sailing ship. 226 people on board drowned. Anna Spafford with her four daughters were on their way to England for vocation. All four children had become Christians not long before they sailed—as little ones can. But all four daughters were lost at sea. When Anna arrived in England she telegraphed her husband back in the US with the words “Saved alone.” As Mr Spafford sailed to England to join his wife he wrote an incredible hymn in commemoration of his four beloved children. He wrote:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul*

This peace did not come from Horatio, it was not worldly peace, it was divine peace which came from God, and it’s the peace every believer can experience in their hearts too.