

Let us turn in our sermon text this morning to the prophesy of Isaiah in chapter 26. Isaiah chapter 26
Isaiah was a prophet who prophesied in the 8th century before Christ. So around 2750 to 2800 years ago.

And if any of you listening are wondering if the Bible has any relevance for today, I hope as we read this chapter, you will see that it most certainly does. Even if you don't understand all the details you will see that it certainly relevant. Keep listening for the last 2 verses.

'In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

"We have a strong city;
God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks.
Open the gates,
That the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.
You will keep him in perfect peace,
Whose mind is stayed on You,
Because he trusts in You.
Trust in the Lord forever,
For in YAH, the Lord , is everlasting strength.
For He brings down those who dwell on high,
The lofty city;
He lays it low,
He lays it low to the ground,
He brings it down to the dust.
The foot shall tread it down—
The feet of the poor
And the steps of the needy."
The way of the just is uprightness;
O Most Upright,
You weigh the path of the just.
Yes, in the way of Your judgments,
O Lord , we have waited for You;
The desire of our soul is for Your name
And for the remembrance of You.
With my soul I have desired You in the night,
Yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early;
For when Your judgments are in the earth,
The inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.
Let grace be shown to the wicked,
Yet he will not learn righteousness;
In the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly,
And will not behold the majesty of the Lord .
Lord , when Your hand is lifted up, they will not see.
But they will see and be ashamed
For their envy of people;
Yes, the fire of Your enemies shall devour them.
Lord , You will establish peace for us,
For You have also done all our works in us.
O Lord our God, masters besides You
Have had dominion over us;
But by You only we make mention of Your name.
They are dead, they will not live;

They are deceased, they will not rise.
Therefore You have punished and destroyed them,
And made all their memory to perish.
You have increased the nation, O Lord ,
You have increased the nation;
You are glorified;
You have expanded all the borders of the land.
Lord , in trouble they have visited You,
They poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them.
As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs,
When she draws near the time of her delivery,
So have we been in Your sight, O Lord .
We have been with child, we have been in pain;
We have, as it were, brought forth wind;
We have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth,
Nor have the inhabitants of the world fallen.
Your dead shall live;
Together with my dead body they shall arise.
Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust;
For your dew is like the dew of herbs,
And the earth shall cast out the dead.
Come, my people, enter your chambers,
And shut your doors behind you;
Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment,
Until the indignation is past.
For behold, the Lord comes out of His place
To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;
The earth will also disclose her blood,
And will no more cover her slain.'

Amen

Isaiah 26:1-21

<https://my.bible.com/bible/114/ISA.26.1-21>

Let us pray:

Oh Lord our God, we pray now Your help as we come to Your Word as the old times we need the aid of Your Spirit as the old times we need to rejoice in the gospel and we need to accept and respond rightly to the warnings and challenge that You bring us. So help us do so by your Spirit we pray.

In Jesus name,
Amen.

So we meet this morning and some on unprecedented circumstances due to the COVID-19 (corona virus). There is pestilence on the land and in the world. And of course there is much other pestilence as well, much other trouble. In the West perhaps, because this is unsettling our way of life so much this is the only thing we are thinking about. But of course Sindh province in Pakistan and various other parts of the world, there is the plague of locust, there is conflict going on still in various parts of the world and so forth.

And what the world therefore is crying out for is peace. All of us are moved by these events and affected by them in various ways. All will have anxieties to some extent.

So it would be helpful this morning to think about perfect peace. And to focus our thought in this chapter, we can't look at everything, but to focus our thoughts and to bring us comfort this morning let us think about verse 3 in particular:

'You will keep him in perfect peace
Whose mind is stayed on You
Because he trusts in You.'

In chapters 24 to 27 of Isaiah, the prophet is contrasting what we call the City of Man and the City of God. He is showing us how the former City of Man, sinful humanity characterized by pride and by self-reliance is overthrown and how the latter characterized by trust in the LORD knows God's perfect peace.

And while Isaiah is addressing the peoples of the world, he is also concerned here for God's people corporately and individually. And this is why we read in verse 3: 'You will keep him in perfect peace'... 'Because he trusts in You'.

So we are taking this wonderful promise as our theme verse and our focus will mainly be on verses 1-6 but we will refer to other parts of the chapter and indeed other parts of the Bible.

But we need to see the priority here. Isaiah is dealing with concerns which are universal. Yet he is also concerned for the individual and their peace with God. And he is concerned for God's people corporately. We are the city of God.

So as we consider God's peace this morning, we need to ask ourselves as individuals: Do we know this peace? And if we know it, Are we rejoicing in it?

So we are thinking about perfect peace, perfect peace. And I would like us to think about it under three headings or from three angles: Firstly the Nature of peace, secondly the road to peace and thirdly the alternative to Peace.

So first of all the nature of peace, secondly the road to peace and lastly the alternative to peace.

So first of all the nature of peace. What is meant here by peace?

Isaiah calls it perfect peace in verse 3. Actually he says Peace peace, what I mean by that is when the Bible was originally written in Hebrew that is what he wrote: Peace peace. So the English translation here grasping his emphasis is calling it perfect peace. It is talking about peace that is real, peace that is true, peace that passes understanding.

The word in Hebrew is SHALOM and maybe you have heard that word. Jews still greet one another today by wishing each other SHALOM that refers to something deep, something wonderful! A completeness, a honourous, a soundness, a harmonious state of mind and body that takes up the whole person.

And yet, this isn't some kind of mystical thing. It is not something you get doing YOGA or something like that. It comes as we shall see through the one whom Isaiah calls the Prince of Peace in this prophecy chapter 9.

This is the peace that comes through Jesus Christ. And this is personal peace that is available to us now. The promises for him or for her, for you or for me.

But of course this peace does not mean we are free from trouble in this world. This chapter is dealing with the peace of God's people in the turmoil of history but the peace comes from the fact that they are secure within God's city.

So we are talking here about a peace that is true. Whether we feel that or not. In other parts of the Bible we learn more about this in Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 5 in verse 1 we read of 'peace with God' and that is an objective reality that if we are trusting in Christ alone, God is no longer our enemy. We are at peace with Him through the LORD Jesus Christ.

And you can also know the peace of God as we read of in Philippians 4:7. God knows our frame, He knows that in times of turmoil we are likely to faint spiritually and go under. And so He gives us the peace of God that transcends all understanding and this will guide your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

And the bigger picture here as we see in verse 1 is that we have this strong city. To belong to God's city, of which strength is a characteristic, is to have a great hope. God's city being His people. Who will ultimately dwell with Him in the new creation. And death, and suffering will be no more.

In the previous chapter of Isaiah chapter 25 in verse 6 we read:

'And in this mountain
The Lord of hosts will make for all people
A feast of choice pieces,
A feast of wines on the lees,
Of fat things full of marrow,
Of well-refined wines on the lees.
And He will destroy on this mountain
The surface of the covering cast over all people,
And the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever,
And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces;
The rebuke of His people
He will take away from all the earth;
For the Lord has spoken.'

So the personal peace, that the believer has is a foretaste of the glories that await us. Verse 19 points to that great day when our bodies perhaps weak in this world are going to be raised. The verse is not perhaps completely clear to exactly is referring but it clearly has the end in view.

And perhaps other great deliverances that God works as well. But this is what we read. And think of the endgame:

'Your dead shall live;
Together with my dead body they shall arise.
Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust;
For your dew is like the dew of herbs,
And the earth shall cast out the dead.'

There is a certain hope for all who believe of being raised again with Christ. The body and soul we might be with Him forever. And that is when this SHALOM, this perfect peace will be fully realised and we will live in Gods presence forever.

So I wonder to be grasp just how great the Christian hope is. Do we realise that we really have good news? Do we see that the gospel is relevant to everyone on Earth?

Shocks like we see at present ought to remind us of this. The gospel comes in to a world where there is no true peace and tells us of a God that gives perfect peace. So we must not, as Gods people, waste this opportunity to tell people this message of personal, perfect peace with God.

Let us rejoice in the gospel. We shouldn't listen to those who might say 'well it's irrelevant for the church to be going on about peace with God when the world is in so much turmoil and so little peace. There is nothing more relevant. We have a great opportunity to point people to where perfect peace may be found. A wonderful opportunity... by our response and by our witness.

Matthew Henry writes: 'When evil tidings are abroad we shall kindly expect the event and not be disturbed by frightful apprehensions arising from them, whose hearts are fixed trusting in the Lord.'

And Psalms 112:7 again talking of Gods people:

'He will not be afraid of evil tidings;
His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.'

So that's the nature of peace. This perfect peace.

Secondly let us consider the road to peace.

'You will keep him in perfect peace
Whose mind is stayed on You
Because he trusts in You.'

Faith or trust is the only requirement for receiving this perfect peace. This theme runs through the opening. Verse 2 says:

'Open the gates, That the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.'

The nation here refers to the believing people of God.

Peter in the New Testament said to God's people: 'You are the chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.' (variation of I Peter 2:9 closer to NIV version)

So this is righteous nation refers to those who by faith are right with God. They were far from perfect. We see in verse 16 how they've been disciplined by God and in verse 18 they speak of their powerlessness and their lack of fruitfulness.

But they nevertheless showed true faith by turning to God in prayer. We are righteous before God, we are the righteous nation purely on the basis of faith. Nothing in us... nothing in us but by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We belong as believers to the nation that keeps the truth, that believes Gods revelation and the way that He's revealed to have this peace.

And then in verse 3 we are told that him whose mind is stayed on you who knows Gods perfect peace.

So this means that the individuals that have their mind steadfastly fixed upon God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit know peace.

We are ought to intentionally and thoughtfully lean upon God in Jesus Christ. That's why the verse goes on to say 'Because He trusts in you.'

This reminds us that it's about more than simply the mind believing all the truth that Gods has revealed, it's about luring ourselves and our entire being (mind, heart, well) upon Christ that we might know his peace.

And with the reminder in verse 4 that our trust must be in the right source:

'Trust in the Lord forever,'

For in YAH (that is just the name of God given here)

'For in YAH, the Lord, is everlasting strength.'

Everlasting strength or as other translators put it a rock eternal. It is God who keeps those who believe in perfect peace. And He is a worthy object of faith because He is the 'rock eternal', the 'everlasting strength', He is the solid foundation which our faith and our peace requires.

Here is a building built on everlasting strength on a foundation of rock that is secure. Not a building that is built on sand and is not secure.

So do you have faith in the right object as your mind and heart and your whole being fixed in trust upon the triune God? Without faith there can be no true peace.

It's possible of course to have a false peace through many things. Through dabbling or spiritualism or on the new age or whatever. But these things are merely having financial security or merely having health or merely having some sort of peace of mind. They cannot bring us God's perfect peace, only complete abandonment to God in Christ coming to him through Jesus can brings us Gods peace.

We must trust on what he has done to bring us peace. Jesus Christ is God the Son eternal, and yet he came and became fully man taking on human flesh and a human nature, he commanded this world and if it was around today He would be as likely to catch corona virus as anyone else. He kept the law perfectly for us, we've broken all of God's commandments, we have disobeyed Him. He died upon the cross in our place, He rose again, and the sense of Spirit of Peace enter the hearts of those who believe to convince them that God is our Father. So do you know peace like that? It is a reality for those whose peace has the proper foundation, for those whose minds are steadfastly fixed upon God in Christ.

So come to Him. And each one of us as God's people, keep on coming to Him, that our faith might be increased. Our faith in increases through Scriptures, through prayer, through preaching, through the sacraments and that is a challenge for the moment but we have the Word, we have prayer , we have all these things. Let us make the most of them.

Our chancellor is doing what he can, it seems, to ensure that the economy doesn't collapse. And how much more will God in these times of restriction graciously compensate and provide for us who believe in the Spiritual Realm.

So we thought about the nature of peace and the road to peace. And lastly the alternative to peace.

Look now to verses 5-6:

'For He brings down those who dwell on high,
The lofty city;
He lays it low,
He lays it low to the ground,
He brings it down to the dust.
The foot shall tread it down –
The feet of the poor
And the steps of the needy.'

And this is the City of Man or the City of this World if you like, being contrasted with the City of God.

Isaiah does not have one city in view. He is thinking about the whole world. We hear today about the global village and perhaps we thought because we have a global village, these things can't affect us but they certainly can.

But the city of man that Isaiah has in mind here has been called the whole world organised on a human centred, non-spiritual basis. And pride is the central characteristic of humanity in sin.

And these verses tell us that self-centred humanity will be brought low. There will be great reversals, the pure dispossessing the proud and so forth.

And history has shown us that the pure and the oppressed have often been more open to the gospel. But whether the economically rich or poor, as I think I said the last time I preached on his pulpit it is those who are pure in spirit who ultimately belong to Gods kingdom and who ultimately will know His peace.

So the alternative to peace is destruction. It'd be irresponsible if I didn't say that, if I didn't remind us that there is this wonderful new creation but there is also hell and are you going to know peace or destruction?

We read twice in this passage there is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked. And we shouldn't think as the wicked merely as those doing terrible wicked acts, murder, war, all these things. But those who are self sufficient puffed up in pride.

So we need to come to Him, we need to leave pride and self sufficiency behind us. We need to leave this city of man behind us and flee to the city of God and to mention the last to verses:

'Come, my people, enter your chambers,
And shut your doors behind you;
Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment,
Until the indignation is past.
For behold the Lord comes out of His place
To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;
The earth will also disclose her blood,
And will no more cover her slain.'

Whether you are self-isolating or merely social distancing, the new vocabulary of 2020 'Let us make sure that we always self-isolate with Christ'

Get right with God and those of us who know Him, let us in these days come closer to Him.

Matthew Henry says 'He calls them nowhere but where he Himself will accompany them.'

He is the place of safety, He gives the keys to the City of God and if you flee there from the City of Man. And as each of us is more and more leaned off the city of man in these days, this is the road to peace. Perfect peace now and full enjoyment of it for all eternity.

'Like a river glorious is God's perfect peace,
Over all victorious, in its bright increase,
Perfect, yet it floweth every day,
Perfect, yet it groweth deeper all the way.
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest
Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.'

(Hymn 687, Christian Hymns)

Let us pray:

Oh Lord our God, we pray that you would indeed help us each to know that we have a place in the heavenly city. That we are in Christ Jesus and that even now we are seated with Him in the heavenly places, and as we think of these things and we think of the hope of the gospel, we pray for your comfort and for your perfect peace to more and more be a reality in our hearts. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.