

Peace to You

Call to Worship: Psalm 2

1st Scripture: John 16:16-33

2nd Scripture: John 20

Hymn #205- *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*

Hymn #206- *Low in the Grave He Lay*

Hymn #24 (Supp)- *Victory in Jesus*

Introduction

One of the strongest expressed desires of virtually all people in the world, is the desire to have “peace.” Nations pray and hope for world peace, where there is no longer war, and where we can all just “get along.” Families hope for peace. Husbands and wives hope for peaceful marriages; parents and children, brothers and sisters, and every thing in between, all hope for peaceful relationships. Individuals desire peaceful work situations, peaceful neighbors and neighborhoods, peace of mind...etc. Heck, the classic gravestone slogan is “RIP,” which means “Rest in peace.”

And all of these national, familial and individual longings for peace, carry with them a very obvious assumption, don't they? We live in a world that is racked with dissension, chaos, unrest and broken relationships. You would think peace would be something that naturally exists amongst living human beings, but it's quite the opposite, isn't it? Life is just full of unrest and turmoil, all throughout. Dilemmas and problems and conflict and pain are all part and parcel for the path of life.

Now, the Word of God gets right to the heart of this matter, taking us to the very root of all conflict and unrest. And rather than leading us to point the finger in every other direction, which our deceptive hearts would do; and rather than shift the blame to particular problems with our upbringing or environment, as modern day Psychology would do, the Scriptures pull out a big fat mirror and say, “Smile, you're the problem.” And collectively, we are all the problem. And at the root of every single form of *horizontal* conflict, lies a foundational *vertical* conflict, between mankind and God. To put it bluntly, we live in a world that lacks peace, because the world (including us) is at enmity with God. The creation (God's creation) is at war with our God and Creator. And that is a guaranteed recipe for turmoil and unrest.

In fact, the moment that our first parents, Adam and Eve, ate of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden, which led to their expulsion from the Garden, was the moment that humanity as a whole, was plunged into relational enmity with God. And this lack of peace with God would lead to turmoil in working, agony and pain in giving birth, dissension between husbands and wives, and an overall breakdown of all harmony in the natural world. Chaos, disorder and unrest were born at the fall of man. And two of the greatest evidences of this reality is that (1st) mankind has died *spiritually*, leading us, from birth, to have no natural desire to know, love and serve the very God who created and designed us for His glory, and (2) mankind dies *physically*, such that we dread the reality of this coming death, for the duration of our short lives.

What a terribly unsettling and frightening reality, to be granted the precious and wonderful reality of existence (of life, itself!), only to learn that we are breaking down and preparing to die, right from the very day that we are born! Injuries, illnesses and diseases bring this stark reality to the forefront. Yes, we attempt to soothe our consciences, by busying ourselves in the affairs of everyday life, and by pushing the reality of death out of mind, but it's an approaching, certain reality nonetheless. Statistically speaking, the odds of you and I dying are 100%.

Is there any hope, in such circumstances that surround all of us? Can we find real and lasting rest/peace, if our condition seems so bleak? Can we live out our days joyfully, purposefully and fearlessly, if we live in a world that has been plunged into the curse of unrest and death? The Scriptures, indeed, provide such hope, and this hope is the very basis for why we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. Jesus Speaks "Peace" to His Disciples

The most common word for "peace," in the Hebrew language is the word "Shalom," which many of us, I'm sure, have heard at some point throughout the course of our lives. And that's because it is a very common, well meant, greeting, which the Jews have often used as a common (and hopefully sincere) courtesy of well wishing to one another. But, what's interesting is that, while the term would certainly have been used by Jesus with His disciples (and others), John only mentions the Greek word for "peace," which is "Eirene," six times in his Gospel. This

is important because none of the Gospel writers waste time recording comments that have no inspired significance for us. And this would certainly be the case for a “Shalom” greeting. And so, while recording such a greeting would be common in the Epistles, which are letters, it just would not be necessary to record the term throughout the course of our Lord’s interactions and dialogs, lest we miss the main purpose of each interaction, or are tempted to diminish the importance of all that is recorded in each dialog.

Now, why do I say this? Because, in the few places that John mentions the word, “peace,” especially in a greeting sense, he means to convey something very important; something far more unique and essential than a common greeting. And so, when John records our Lord’s words, “Peace to you,” three times, here in Chapter 20; a greeting which is nowhere else recorded in the rest of his Gospel, he aims to grab hold of our attention in a very intentional and profound way. Now, before we delve deeper into understanding the nature of this greeting here in Chapter 20, let me just make a few comments about the only three other times where John uses the word “peace” (eirene), in the whole of his Gospel.

It is interesting to note that the only other times John uses the word “peace,” are found in our Lord’s farewell discourse to His Apostles, just before He is about to face His crucifixion. And so, as our Lord gathers with His Apostles and addresses them with His final discourse, He speaks of this “peace,” and then following His resurrection, the first time He is gathered with all of them again (less Thomas), is on a Sunday, where He greets them twice with this same word, “peace.” And then finally, a week later, again, on a Sunday, when Thomas is present, He greets them all again with that same greeting, “Peace to you!”

Now, as we seek to unlock the meaning behind (our Lord’s use of) this phrase, let us just work through a brief survey of the texts that contain the word “peace” in them.

1) John 14:27 [Read vs. 25-31]. Here, the word “peace” is used two times, both in verse 27, and the second usage is simply a direct reiteration of the first usage. “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you...” And as I have already stated, these usages, as well as the one that will follow, are found in our Lord’s farewell discourse, where He is preparing His disciples for His upcoming death, and ultimate departure. To be sure, they will face very difficult trials up ahead, and our Lord would not be visibly present with them.

And so, He seeks to offer comforting words to them, assuring them that they do not have to be afraid. For one, the Holy Spirit would be with them, and He would remind them of all that the Lord has taught them, so that they could stand and endure whatever the enemy brings against them. It is no mere coincidence that our Lord refers to the Holy Spirit as the “Comforter,” who would provide His disciples with every bit of comfort and help that they would need, in the absence of the visible Christ. And so, in this sense, our Lord speaks of the peace that He will leave with them, so that, they could remain confident (and at rest), even in the midst of difficult trials and great opposition. Our Lord comes back to this reality, in a most profound way, at the very end of His farewell discourse as well, which brings us to our third textual usage of the word “peace.”

2) John 16:33. These are our Lord’s final words (of His farewell discourse), before He lifts His eyes to heaven and prays to the Father. And it is here, that He summarily assures them of two things. First, in the world, they will most certainly face tribulation. The road up ahead would involve many trials and sufferings. But secondly, even in the midst of such tribulations, the comforting reality was that His disciples, could yet, always have an unshakeable peace, in Christ. And the reason for this, is given in the second part of verse 33. The world will provide the people of God with great tribulations. The world will bring suffering. But, at the end of the day, Jesus Himself has overcome the world, and nothing can change what He has accomplished, in doing that. And for this reason, His disciples could maintain boldness, joy and confidence, no matter what they faced. Now, we will open this up further, shortly, but let us consider our three remaining texts, which also contain the word “peace,” before we do so.

3) John 20:19, 21 & 26. Again, following the resurrection of Christ, at His first and second appearing to His disciples, He proclaims peace to them (read 20:19-20, 26). In these instances where Jesus appears to His disciples, on both occasions, they are locked in a room, attempting to remain hidden from the Jews, who would surely come after them, now that they have crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, there is a sense of fear, worry and concern, over what the disciples will do next, as they move forward, following the Lord’s death. And it is in this setting, that Jesus appears in the midst of them and seeks to console them, offering them a solid hope for the path that now stood before them. He had laid an important cornerstone, upon

which, they would now be given every bit of authority and power to build. And so, He greets them with these most comforting words, “Peace be with you!”

Having taken a brief look at the texts, within which, John had intentionally brought out our Lord’s use of this important word, “peace,” let us then move on to bring this all together, seeking to grasp what it meant for the disciples of our Lord, and what it also then means for us, here this morning.

II. Bringing it All Together

What then is the significance of our Lord’s repeated declaration of “peace” to His disciples? And how would this “peace” offer them any comfort in the times ahead, where they would face very difficult trials and tribulations in the world?

Well brethren, simply put, this “peace” was tied to the resurrection of our Lord, which we ultimately celebrate every Sunday, and perhaps, in a special way this morning. The peace that our Lord gave His disciples was the most essential peace in all the world, and indeed, that peace which could lead anyone to endure any worldly opposition or turmoil. This peace was peace with God, wasn’t it? The greatest stumbling block for mankind is not the pains and sufferings of this life, as difficult and as painful as they all might be. The greatest stumbling block for man is that, as we’ve seen already, in Adam, we are all natural born enemies of God. The world is as it is, and we have no natural desire to know God and to do what pleases Him; and we have every unnatural desire to, in fact, love the very things that God hates, because we are at enmity with God because of our sin nature. And the consequences from this enmity are most dreadful and horrifying. We stand condemned, and naturally under the judgment of God, and because of the holy nature of God, we experience not merely the first death, but also eternal judgment and torment and suffering in hell. And so, this is mankind’s greatest dilemma.

But, the peace of God, which Jesus gave to His disciples, and which He gives to all who truly have faith in Him, is full pardon for sins, reconciliation with God, and eternal life in heaven with Him. And it is in between the uses of the word “peace” that we have considered, that we find the very true and just source of that peace. It was in our Lord’s great agony and suffering, leading up to and ultimately culminating at His crucifixion, that He had purchased peace for His

people. He Himself became the sin bearer for His people, taking all of their sins upon Himself (although He Himself was without any sin of His own, He bore their sins in His own body on the tree) and He absorbed the full and just weight of God's wrath for those sins, ultimately laying down His life even unto death. But then, following this, three days later, because death could not hold Him, He was raised victoriously from the dead, gaining the divine affirmation that His substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of sinners was accepted.

And so, when our risen Lord approaches His fretful disciples in that locked room, this is the peace that He proclaims unto them. They now, legally had peace with God. And this peace not only reconciled them to God, but furthermore, it guaranteed that they would live forever with God, in glory!

And how does such peace offer comfort in the face of a very difficult road that lay ahead? How would such peace benefit them, knowing that they would be called to suffer many things, and even death itself, for the sake of the Kingdom of God? Because now, death would do nothing more than usher them into the glorious and eternal Kingdom of God, forever! Death, which once tormented the soul, would now be a gateway; indeed, a welcoming banner into the eternal presence of God. And in the end, even their broken and torn bodies would be restored by God. Jesus's own resurrected body served to exemplify this!

And so, friends, here then is the glorious message that is presented to you, again, this morning. I ask you, do you have true peace? Do you have everlasting peace? I'm not asking if you are financially well off. I'm not asking if you are as healthy as ever, without any present, physical complications. I'm not asking if you have everything you could ever dream of *in this world*. I'm asking if you have peace with God, through the once crucified, but now resurrected and ascended Christ? Because, you see, you can have everything else in this entire world, all wrapped up in one nice ball...but the reality is, you are going to soon die. You can't take any of this with you. And you will stand before your God and Creator, and you will give an account for your life. And if you die, outside of Jesus Christ; if Jesus is not your Lord and Savior, then you will live in eternal misery and regret, once you pass through the grave. And whatever you have enjoyed in this very, very short life, will never, ever, have been worth it, then. Indeed, it will only serve to taunt you, then! [The Gospel; the need to repent and follow Christ, as well]

Finally, brethren; does this not give us great reason to rejoice, no matter what circumstances we might face in this life? This is the very joy that sent unwavering martyrs to be burnt at the stake, with great confidence. They knew they had peace with God. And they knew that although their enemies in this world could, at best, kill the body, their souls would be safely brought to Christ. Brethren, let it be your joyful and comforting meditation, today (and everyday, for that matter) to know that whatever happens; whatever you have faced, are facing or will face...you have true and unending peace with God! For Christ died and has risen again!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25