

We're continuing through our series, "REVIVE." We've been studying several benedictions (or blessings), declarations of what God does and how God acts. This message talks about the benediction of peace.

I have an assumption about all of us. I realize making a general assumption is potentially dangerous, so I thought I'd share my assumption, and you can evaluate if it's right for you. Here is my assumption: we all want peace. We want things to work out, life to go smoothly, divisions to be healed, or the hurry to dissipate. In fact, even as I say the word "peace," myriad of images likely come to your mind on what peace looks like for you: sitting on a beach, an afternoon hiking, being alone, or time with family. Peace could mean a relationship change, a job change, or a house change. It could mean more work or more time away from work. We all pursue peace.

### **Our search for peace**

For many of us, the pursuit of peace is challenging. Peace is like "rest"—we want it, but we're not sure how to get it. We get glimpses of peace, but it seems fleeting and out of reach. The activities we choose to get peace are often not lasting and require us to step out of the everyday life. For example, maybe you go on vacation for a week. You hope by getting out of town you can be refreshed and re-engaged. You experience precisely that, but then you come home again to the things, which stirred the need to get away in the first place. How do we make sense of that?

The longing for peace reminds one of a tension. The tension is we were created to live a life characterized by eternity, but we live in a world marred by sin. We live in a world that doesn't work as it should, but we want to be a part of changing that reality. When people ask, "How was your vacation?" And you respond: "I didn't want to come back," there is something true about the human experience in that statement. We want "peace" in the midst of our every day.

We all want peace. Here's what I want you to hear: Jesus offers a way of peace, which connects us to the life God designed us to live. Jesus offers a way of peace, which transforms us in our every day. Jesus offers a better way. In his benediction, Paul highlights two distinctive characteristics of the peace, which Jesus offers. But first, we need to look at peace in Paul's culture.

**Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. (2 Thessalonians 3:16)**

### **Lord of peace**

Paul begins with an interesting phrase, "*Lord of peace.*" To capture the significance of this, we need to understand the dynamics of Paul's culture. In the first century, there was a person who many people referred to as lord, son of god, and savior (among other terms). His name was Caesar Augustus (and the Caesars that followed). Augustus brought peace to the Roman Empire by defeating their enemies and expanding the empire. Within Roman imperial theology, Augustus brought peace.

In BC 13, the Roman Senate commissioned the Altar of Augustan Peace, a large monument, which declares their view that Augustus was the one who brought peace and good news to the world. You can still visit the altar in Rome today.

For our purposes, what's interesting about the Altar of Augustan Peace is the depiction of peace and the depiction Augustus' role. There are images of peace carved in various places on the monument. One portion has the goddess, Roma, seated atop a pile of defeated weapons. The images of prosperity—ox/sheep eating freely, water bubbling from overturned amphora, and vegetation—are subtle, but intentional. Another section has the goddess, Pax (Latin for, peace), surrounded by Sky and Sea. In other words, the world is at peace.

The key figure, of course, is Augustus. But he is surprisingly not where you would expect. One side of the monument has a procession of Senators and Aristocrats—the place where you would expect the emperor—but Augustus is not there. Instead, Augustus is on the other side, in the procession of priests. Augustus is veiled with a head covering (as was common in that day for men in worship), and he is leading the procession of priests. The message is powerful: Augustus is the chief priest. He has brought peace to the world and is the true lord. One interesting historical note: with the rise of fascism during the Second World War, the Italian dictator, Mussolini, wanted this altar prominently displayed. Mussolini saw himself as the one who would revive the ancient Roman standard of lordship.

As ancient inscription from another part of the empire puts it: "The eternal and immortal nature of everything has bestowed upon mankind the greatest good...by bringing Caesar Augustus... savior of the common race of men...For land and sea are at peace, and the cities flourish with good order, concord and prosperity."

When Paul uses the term, "*Lord of peace,*" Paul is not referring to Caesar, but Jesus. In fact, the original Greek of this benediction

begins with “the Lord Himself,” emphasizing that the person who brings peace is Jesus. Peace is what God the Son does, what God the Spirit gives, and what God the Father orchestrates. God is “...the Fountain and Dispenser of [peace]” (Adam Clarke).

Paul is challenging how the world works. To say Jesus is Lord is to claim that Caesar is not. This is an implicit claim that the way to peace the world offers isn't the best way. The systems, which define how the world works aren't for your good. The peace that Jesus offers is better.

“Peace” is connected to the Jewish idea of “shalom.” Shalom refers to wholeness and completeness. Shalom is something, which transforms our every day living for the good. Shalom is, as one scholar put it, “prosperity in the widest sense” (Leon Morris).

Shalom highlights a different type of peace. In our culture, we tend to describe peace in the negative (i.e., peace is the absence of something). For example, you might think to yourself, “I would have peace if I could get out of my job.” But shalom portrays peace in the positive (i.e., peace is the addition of something). Something can be different for you in the midst of a job that isn't going well.

Paul describes the peace of Jesus with several fascinating terms. **“At all times”** would be better translated “continually.” Paul describes God's gift of peace as “constant and unbroken” (Leon Morris). God doesn't take a break from acting for peace. When you are faithful, He works for your good. When you are unfaithful, He acts for your good.

**“In every way”** in the original Greek language refers to changing circumstances. When life goes the way that you want, and when life is spinning out of control, God continually acts for your peace. Paul told the church in Rome God uses every situation for our good (Romans 8:28). Not that every situation is good—we live in a sin-marred world marked by evil and heartache—but rather God works every situation for your good. Changing circumstances do not change God's continual grace.

God's presence solidifies His continual, unbroken grace. God never leaves. Paul's audience was a blend of people who were faithful, and people who were not. Paul's declaration to both the faithful and the idle is God will be with them because of Jesus. The 19th-century English preacher, Charles Spurgeon, marveled at God's presence in our lives with these words: “Our God has not left us at any time. We have had dark nights, but the star of love has shone forth amid the blackness; we have been in stern conflicts, but over our head He has held aloft the shield of our defense. We have gone through many trials, but never to our detriment, always to our advantage; and the conclusion from our past

experience is that he who has been with us in six troubles, will not forsake us in the seventh. What we have known of our faithful God, proves that he will keep us to the end.”

Why does Paul highlight God is present with them? Because, as we saw at the start of the verse, peace is a gift and work of God. If God is present, peace is available. A phrase which appears in both in the Old Testament and New Testament is, “go in peace.” You can “go” with peace because you go with God. Paul's world offered peace, but he reminded the Thessalonians the way of Jesus is better.

Interestingly, Jesus spoke directly about the options of peace in His world. As Jesus was on the eve of dying on a Roman cross, Jesus said to His closest followers, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”** (John 14:27). Jesus said there is peace from the world. Perhaps He had Augustus' peace in mind, but either way, Jesus doesn't deny there are systems in the world, which offer peace. But Jesus offers a different peace. His disciples have options on where to search for peace. Jesus offers a better peace, which transforms them in the midst of their fear.

You have options in your search for peace. Some are good, but not the best. Some options are harmful and will carry a cost. Maybe you have given time, money, or yourself in ways of peace, which aren't for your good, and you're wondering if there is another option. Maybe you've tried ways of peace that weren't harmful, but didn't last. You feel like you're on a constant search for something more, and you are wondering if there is another option. Jesus offers a better way forward through a relationship with Him.

I would like to end by giving you space to speak with our heavenly Father about the search for peace. There are people around you who don't know Jesus offers peace for them. We live in a world, which doesn't work as it should. We were reminded of this with the news of parents and children being separated. Whatever your political party, there is a sense that we've lost our way as human beings. Maybe some of you have an opportunity to affect change nationally or globally this week, but all of us have an opportunity this week to point people near us to the way of peace in Jesus.

This starts with you coming to Jesus. Take time to quietly converse with your heavenly Father regarding your search for peace. Confess ways you've abandoned His best for a faulty peace. Hear again His call of grace, which speaks to you continually and in every circumstance.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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Catalog No.1438-4S