



PEACE

WEEK 5
04.02.17

FOCUS VERSE

Psalm 119:165

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

LESSON TEXT

John 14:23–27

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

I Thessalonians 5:23

23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.



FOCUS THOUGHT

God's peace keeps our hearts and minds secure in this troubled world.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Peace in Troubled Times

We live in a troubled world. There is no shortage of situations and events that threaten to steal our peace. As if we do not have enough to worry about, the news media present us with a continuous stream of all that is wrong in the world. It seems as if every day we hear about another natural disaster, mass shooting, or heinous crime. Surrounded by so much negativity, we often find ourselves worried about our own safety and security. How can we rest in God's peace under these circumstances?

It is important to remember that God's peace transcends our present reality. Our peace is founded on the belief that God is able to work all things together for our good.

We must not allow the turmoil around us to make us call God's sovereignty into question. In His wisdom, God allows evil to exist in our world. This means that we may indeed experience trials and suffering. God's Word does not promise us that life will always be easy.

However, the Resurrection reminds us that our Lord has overcome death itself. His victory over death gives us hope that we will live forever with Him. How liberating it is to realize that, in Christ, there is no more reason to fear death. Why should we fear any lesser threat? We are completely secure in Jesus. Come what may, we can trust that God is in control, that He is just, and that our future is in good hands.

OUTLINE

I. PEACEMAKER FOR TODAY

- A. World Looking for Peace
- B. World Looking in Wrong Places

II. PEACE PROMISED

- A. Peace Given
- B. Peace Received

III. PEACE POSSESSED

- A. Perfect Peace Within
- B. Paths of Peace
- C. Peace that Passes Understanding
- D. Peace Enjoyed

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Peace is pleasant to the human soul. To be satisfying, a story must contain a conflict that the author works to resolve. People in a state of unrest naturally seek rest. Order is preferable to chaos. In the Creation narrative, God was portrayed as establishing order on the earth, culminating in the peaceful Garden of Eden. In fact, humanity's love for peace can be traced to the image of God, which we bear (Genesis 1:26).

Unfortunately, sin has tainted the once-perfect creation we inhabit, introducing disorder into our relationships with God and each other. In spite of our best efforts, the peace we crave often eludes our grasp. But we are not doomed to live in chaos. As Christians we possess God's Word, which teaches us how to order our lives. This truth allowed the psalmist to exult, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165). In addition, peace is listed as one of the qualities the Spirit brings to our lives, and we are also encouraged to pursue it. (See Galatians 5:22; I Peter 3:11.)

The Hebrew word *shalom*, often translated "peace" in the Old Testament, can also carry the idea of wholeness or completeness. God desires for us to be at peace, but this entails more than simply not being in conflict. Peace also involves living up to the potential God designed humans to fulfill. It includes both inner tranquility and positive action to maintain peace in our relationships with others. We are at peace when we worship God wholeheartedly, love our neighbors genuinely, and work to establish God's justice in the world.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. PEACEMAKER FOR TODAY

A. World Looking for Peace

One does not have to look far to see that countless people in the world lack peace. Wars are being waged throughout our world, and there is no indication this reality will change in the near future. Rich and powerful people continue to oppress those under their control. Families continue to be disrupted and destroyed by selfish choices and misplaced priorities. Politicians continue to trumpet their solutions to societal problems, but their proposals ring false and hollow. The truth is that despite all their valiant efforts, humans will never be able to find peace apart from a right relationship with their Creator.

Our lesson text consists of the first part of Jesus' answer to the question Judas (not Iscariot) asked in the previous verse: "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" (John 14:22). At first glance it might be difficult to understand why Jesus seemed to avoid answering his question directly. We will work to understand the meaning of Jesus' answer in John 14:23–27 in the rest of this lesson. To begin with, it is helpful to realize that within the larger context of this section of John's Gospel, Judas's question reflected the disciples' anxiety related to Jesus' imminent departure. After Jesus informed them, "Whither I go, ye cannot come" (John 13:33), Peter, Thomas, and the others immediately began to wonder where Jesus would be going, why they would be unable to accompany Him, and which road He would take. (See John 13:36–37; 14:5.)

While these questions were somewhat misguided, necessitating Jesus' further explanations, it is not difficult to understand how the disciples were feeling. They were distressed to think Jesus was leaving them after only a few short years. This would entail a disruption of their expectations, and they were struggling to find answers about an uncertain future. Far from being calm and peaceful, they were overcome by worry.

In the twenty-first century, we often find ourselves in similar emotional states. When we contemplate the future, we often have

more questions than answers. Will we have enough money to retire? Will our children serve God faithfully? Will we survive a struggle with cancer? Such concerns are certainly legitimate; however, like the disciples, we are often asking the wrong questions. Uncertainty about the future will always be a part of the human condition; yet there is a way to live in peace. Come what may, we must place our confidence in God's goodness and His ability to ensure that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

B. World Looking in Wrong Places

As if lacking peace were not a sufficient problem, our misplaced efforts to find peace often simply add to our turmoil. An individual tormented by inner pain can find relief by dulling his senses through various means—entertainment, alcohol, drugs, or illicit sex. It is possible to temporarily escape from economic difficulties by charging expenses on a credit card. Likewise, if one is struggling to get along with coworkers, taking a vacation will provide a short-term reprieve. But it is easy to see that these quick fixes are avoiding the real heart of the problem. The only way to find lasting peace is through an intimate connection with Jesus Christ.

When Jesus informed the disciples, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me," Judas and the others must have experienced profound disappointment (John 14:19). The disciples had hoped the larger populace would recognize Jesus as the true Messiah. If Jesus were preparing to leave them now, what would become of their dreams of an earthly Jewish kingdom? They expected Jesus the Messiah to establish ethnic Israel as a political power in a world dominated by the Roman Empire. Even after the Resurrection the disciples remained confused on this point, asking, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

In this light Judas's question begins to make more sense: "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" (John 14:22). Judas seemed to have been implying that Jesus could not leave

because His messianic task was not complete. The crowds had eaten the bread and received the miracles, but the widespread acclaim for Jesus that the disciples desired had not come about. Indeed, Jesus had offered resistance to the crowds' intent to make him a king. (See John 6:15.) Judas wanted to know why Jesus had revealed His true identity to the small inner circle only, while allowing the larger world to remain in the dark.

In Jesus' answer we see Him gently redirecting Judas's attention to the more critical issue. "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" (John 14:23-24). It seems Jesus was telling Judas and the others present that what would be important in the future would be whether they obeyed Him, loved Him, and had a relationship with Him, not which nation held political power in Palestine.

What the disciples were slow to understand was that Jesus loved and desired to redeem the entire world, not just the Jews. (See John 3:16.) While Judas framed the situation as "us" against "the world," Jesus adjusted that concept to be "those who love me and keep my words" as opposed to "those who do not love me or keep my words." Jesus was preparing them for the time in the near future when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on both Jews and Gentiles who would make up the new people of God. (See Ephesians 2:14-15.) The disciples were looking for political peace established by miraculous power; Jesus was preparing to submit Himself to the cross, which would pave the way for true peace to be made between creature and Creator. He was informing them they were looking for peace in the wrong places.

The psalmist expressed a profound truth when he declared, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7). Our security is not found in the power structures of the world but in our connection to our God. Many people erroneously believe that if they could only solve all their problems, they would

experience peace. But Christian peace transcends the troubles that exist and will always exist in our lives. We can have peace, not because everything is right in our world now, but because we trust that God is in control and that He will make all things right in the end.

In our text, Jesus worked to assure His disciples that their security and well-being were not dependent upon His continued bodily presence on the earth. Of course, this would require them to rethink their preconceived ideas about the mission of the Jewish Messiah. Jesus explained it would be necessary for Him to go away, but He would not leave them utterly alone. "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:25-26).

In this promise, Jesus was reminding them that while He would be bodily absent, the Holy Spirit would be their constant companion in the future. Earlier in this same chapter Jesus had identified Himself with this coming Holy Spirit, saying simply, "I will come to you" (John 14:18). This must have been somewhat confusing to the disciples at the time, but following their experience of the Spirit at Pentecost they would "bear witness" to this reality (John 15:27).

II. PEACE PROMISED

A. Peace Given

Peace is a promised gift from God. Near the beginning of his letters Paul often conferred on his readers grace and peace from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Galatians 1:3; Philippians 1:2; I Thessalonians 1:1.) This is also a common practice among other New Testament authors. (See I Peter 1:2; II Peter 1:2; II John 3.) Likewise, in the final verse of our lesson text, Jesus promised His disciples He would give them peace. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27).

The perceptive reader will wonder what Jesus meant by contrasting the way He would give peace with the way the world gives

peace. One can certainly note in a rather general way that obedience to the gospel and subsequent faithfulness to the Christian life results in profound peace for the human soul. We were created to love and worship God, and we will never be content with anything else. Doubtless, this godly peace can be contrasted with the temporary distractions and pleasures of sin, which ultimately fail to satisfy one's need for God. But it seems that Jesus must have been getting at something more than this rather simple truism.

In considering the way the disciples must have understood the word *world* in our text, it is helpful to note that for all practical purposes the world of Jesus' day was a Roman world. Jesus lived and John wrote his Gospel during the period of *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace), in which Rome was the largely undisputed political authority in the entire Mediterranean world. Rome's emperors were proud of the peace they maintained throughout the empire.

But Edward Gibbon reminded us that this so-called peace was both bloody and costly. "The terror of the Roman arms added weight and dignity to the moderation of the emperors. They preserved peace by a constant preparation for war; and while justice regulated their conduct, they announced to the nations on their confines, that they were as little disposed to endure, as to offer an injury" (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*). In short, the disciples (and everyone else living in the Roman Empire) were used to thinking of peace as something enforced and maintained by military might. It is only natural that they expected their Messiah to establish the promised peace by overthrowing the Gentile political kingdoms.

In John 14:27, however, Jesus was explaining that the peace He brought was of a completely different sort than that proclaimed by Rome. Roman peace was only maintained by the threat of violent subjugation and even death at the hand of a powerful military machine. Clearly Jesus had a different kind of peace in mind. Jesus would certainly give the disciples peace, but the Roman Empire would still be around for quite some time.

Even after Rome's fall, Christians would face the oppression of other political and religious powers through the coming millennia. Jesus

made this clear when He informed the disciples that "if the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18) and "if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). (See also John 16:1-4.) At the end of the discourse, Jesus implied they would continue to face tribulation in the world indefinitely. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The peace Jesus would give would not prevent recipients from facing oppression; the good news and the basis for this promised inner peace was that Jesus had "overcome the world."

B. Peace Received

We can begin to see at this point that the disciples, overcome by anxiety over Jesus' imminent death, were unable to understand what they saw clearly after the Resurrection. If Jesus had not died, He would have been unable to demonstrate His victory over death. Rather than simply defeat the Romans militarily—fighting death with more death—Jesus intended to subvert the power of death itself by rising on Easter morning. By leaving them temporarily, Jesus was purchasing for them a most profound peace.

In the early church period, the apostles were willing to face persecution, imprisonment, and death without fear, because they served a risen Lord who had demonstrated His absolute dominion over death itself. The Resurrection means that death, the world's ultimate weapon, is not to be feared. If our Lord has defeated death, what else can threaten us? If Jesus our Lord has conquered death, then we can rest assured death will not hold us captive either. It is with this truth in mind that Paul exclaimed, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (I Corinthians 15:55).

From our historical vantage point, it is easy to see that if Jesus had simply overthrown the Roman Empire and established a similar kingdom in its place, it would have meant nothing. He would have been just another military leader in the long annals of human history. Thankfully, Jesus established much more than just another human kingdom. He founded

an everlasting Kingdom through which all humanity can experience redemption and transformation. In this spiritual Kingdom, a transcendent peace is available to all.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:6–7).

How wonderful to know that when we are filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, we enter into this eternal kingdom of God. “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17).

III. PEACE POSSESSED

A. Perfect Peace Within

There remains one small portion of our lesson text to consider. After promising that He would give them peace, Jesus admonished His disciples, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). These words represented a formidable challenge for the disciples. Jesus’ arrest, trial, and violent crucifixion were close at hand. How were they to live through those events free from worry and fear? It seems clear that they did not. Peter and an unnamed disciple accompanied Jesus part of the way. Unfortunately, according to Mark’s Gospel, the third time Peter was approached by someone who said he was “one of them,” Peter “began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak” (Mark 14:70–71). The rest of the disciples addressed in John 14:27 are strangely absent from the narrative. (See John 18:10, 15, 25–27.)

In spite of this failure on the part of the disciples, as we read John’s Gospel today we can learn from their examples. Peter had declared, “I will lay down my life for thy sake” (John 13:37). But when this bold declaration was put to the test, he failed to live up to his words. Ultimately, this failure was one of faith. Peter and the other disciples likely

had begun to doubt that Jesus was really the “Christ of God” Peter had affirmed Him to be (Luke 9:20). None of the disciples could have anticipated the horrible event of Jesus’ crucifixion on a Roman cross. When this occurred, their faith was dealt a severe blow, and Jesus’ words of warning were temporarily forgotten.

It is easy to criticize the disciples for their lack of faith, but we can easily fall prey to the same temptation. When we fail to trust God completely, the adverse circumstances of life will rob us of our peace. But Jesus’ resurrection reminds us that even when circumstances look hopeless, God is still in complete control. Isaiah reminded us that there is an integral connection between steadfast trust in God and inner peace. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isaiah 26:3).

B. Paths of Peace

While the focus of this lesson so far has been on inner peace, it is important to keep in mind that an important aspect of peace in the New Testament is the peace among fellow believers. Jesus died on behalf of the entire world. In so doing He demonstrated His profound love for all humanity. As beneficiaries of Christ’s love, we are called to demonstrate this same love to others without discrimination. (See John 13:34; Romans 14:15; I John 4:11.) If we love one another, we will work to avoid dissension and division. (See Romans 14:19; II Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 12:14.) In Ephesians and elsewhere it is argued that Gentiles and Jews are made one in Christ Jesus through the work of the Cross (Ephesians 2:11–22). Harmonious fellowship and unity in the church reflect this reality to the world, and as such, should be a part of the normal Christian life.

C. Peace that Passes Understanding

The peace Jesus offers is amazing! When we choose to entrust our lives into His care, profound relief and strong confidence flood our souls. In light of His loving concern for us, we are challenged to allow God to carry our anxieties (I Peter 5:7). Our task is simply to maintain a spirit of thankfulness while offering our requests to God in prayer. When we do this, we have this blessed promise: “And the

peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

D. Peace Enjoyed

Jesus is our peace in a troubled world. There is a story recounted in three of the Gospels in which Jesus and the disciples were in a boat on the sea. Interestingly, in spite of a rough storm, Jesus was calmly sleeping. (See Matthew 8:24; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:23.) The disciples became quite anxious and fearful, and they awakened Jesus in desperation. He simply spoke to the storm and calmed the wind and sea. He then rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith. This story serves as a powerful challenge to us today. We often find ourselves in stormy situations in which our faith is tested. Our challenge is to hold on to our faith in God and trust in His ability to keep us secure. Nothing the world can throw at us is greater than the One who has overcome the world. (See John 16:33.) In this realization we can find and maintain true and lasting peace.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Many elements of our modern world threaten to rob us of our peace. Advances in technology constantly present us with depictions of people who are more beautiful, talented, rich, or powerful than we will ever be. This reality invites us to compare ourselves

with unrealistic ideals on a regular basis. If we are not watchful, this can lead to dissatisfaction with our own lives. In this regard, Paul’s example challenges us to be content in whatever state we find ourselves (Philippians 4:11). It is also helpful to remember that God does not judge us based on the performance of others. Each of us stands before God alone, and He will not require of us more than we are able to give. As we saw in our lesson text, the critical issue is to love Him and obey His words (John 14:23).

Attention to this core issue will also help with another threat to peace—the busyness that often consumes our time and taxes our sanity. Our culture calls us to excel, to be the best we can be at school, at work, at play, and at home. We are inundated with books and magazines that promise to reveal secrets to achieve success in all kinds of areas.

While it is certainly commendable to strive for excellence, we should realize there are limitations to our time and strength. Setting priorities and managing our time accordingly is essential if we are to live in peace as God intends. We should value our relationships with God and others above all else. Jesus, our example, spent His time on earth loving and serving others. We would do well to keep in mind Jesus’ timeless advice. “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (John 12:25). ■

REFLECTIONS

- How can we maintain our peace in spite of an uncertain future?
- Discuss the ways in which people often seek to find peace outside of a relationship with God.
 - What was Jesus getting at when He contrasted the way He would give peace with the way the world gives peace?
 - How does the fact of Jesus’ resurrection offer us profound peace as we contemplate our own deaths?
 - Consider the relationship between faith in God and inner peace.
 - Discuss some practical ways to seek peace with fellow believers.