

Intro: The Prince of Peace has arrived.

Peace is a word that we throw around quite a bit, usually in the contexts of conflicts far away and external to us. However, peace is also the calming of the conflict within us, the internal anxieties which chase us, haunt us, and hound us. In our workaholic culture, we need to recognize the great gift that this peace within, from God, incomprehensible, really is, because our relationship with God, with others, with the world, and with ourselves is so discombobulated that we don't even know how to rest rightly.

And there are reasons for this, right? Jobs are insecure. Technology, which was supposed to make our lives fuller, has somehow enslaved us to it and leads to longing for more and more, the opposite of peace.

Not only that, but we are the first culture in history which emphasizes individual self-defining personhood. In other words, you can decide what you want to be, but then you are judged on how well you attain it. Traditionally and historically, we used to be defined by our family relationships (which is why typically surnames were related to familial history), but in our culture family no longer helps root us or guide our decisions, they are individually chosen, pursued, attained/lost, which means that there has never been such a cultural expectation of success either financially or emotionally. Success and failure becomes a life and death issue for our sense of personhood, meaning, because there is nothing to fall back on except my own ability to make things what they are supposed to be.

So, it's no wonder that we lack peace. There is an incessant inner turmoil in our souls, not merely physical fatigue, but soul fatigue, that comes from the deep soulish compulsion to prove ourselves. This incessant inner turmoil comes from self-righteousness, trying to control our own lives, be the captains of our own souls, the masters of our fates...but all it has done is exhaust us and make us horrible people to be around.

And as we roll into this holiday season of vacations and rest from work, we must recognize that all the vacations in the world will not grant us this deep soul peace that we need, that rest from striving to make ourselves safe, to fulfill the longings of our heart, and to rest from trying to prove ourselves.

There is a man who brings this peace. This inner soul rest from the conflicts within it, and without it. It was prophesied of Him by Isaiah: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace..."

1. What is Peace?

- a. Peace, in the biblical revelation, has more to do with wholeness, the completion of the soul, the way things are supposed to be
 - i. It is an inner rest, the peace of a contented baby sleeping on his mother's chest (Ps 131)
 - ii. It is the peace that surpasses the comprehension of thoughts raised up against it as to why one *shouldn't* rest, answering fears with certainty
 - iii. Peace that pervades every dire circumstance and each mortal terror with a resounding rest and satisfaction "*in Christ Jesus*"
 1. What does this phrase, "in Christ", mean?
 2. It is a representative term, like a union leader, or a head of household: whatever he does, the whole group does
- b. Peace in Christ is Wholeness in Our Relationship with God
 - i. The most terrifying danger of all is the terror of God's justice and righteousness.
 1. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31)
 2. There is no terror like the fear that transfixes itself upon our souls in the face of death, therefore the scripture says: "**[Jesus] would free those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.**" (Heb 2:15)
 - ii. The ills and terrors of this world are frightful, too, but only in so much as what lies behind and underneath them, the terror of judgment or meaninglessness
 1. Terror of Judgment:
 - a. Remember Epicurus' 4 steps from last week?
 - b. If we did not believe that there was a standard of righteousness that was expected us, or an exacting of vengeance upon injustices committed by us, then we would not fear death

- c. It is His holy justice and perfect Law that rages against our sinful souls and blows with hurricane force against us, so that we respond, “Who is there to save us from this danger?!”
2. Terror of Meaninglessness
- a. Some of you are questioning whether such a God exists, but your soul is still not at rest, because if he doesn’t, then what is the point of all of this...life?
 - b. If there is no Maker who “remembers” man, then life is utterly meaningless and insignificant – nothing you do ultimately matters – it will all burn up in the sun
 - i. *You are the product of causes that had no prevision of the end they were achieving. All your hopes, all your fears, all your loves, all your beliefs of your mind, are nothing but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms and molecules.*
 - Bertrand Russell
 - ii. *We are children of chaos...the deep structure of change is decay. At root, there is only corruption, and the unstemmable tide of chaos. Gone is purpose; all that is left is direction. This is the bleakness we have to accept as we peer deeply and dispassionately into the heart of the Universe.*
 - Peter Atkins
 - c. This cognitive dissonance between our desire for significance and the lack of a basis for it without a Maker who is eternal and to whom all must answer, murmurs in our souls with an incessant inner turmoil
- iii. *In Christ* there is reconciliation with God, so that we are safe from God’s justice:
- 1. God’s justice is a problem to us because we are unjust towards Him and towards His world
 - a. *The London Times once sent an invite for people to respond to the question, “What is wrong with the world?” G.K. Chesterton, the well-known poet and author, simply wrote them back, “Dear sirs, I am. Yours, G.K. Chesterton.”*
 - b. We need a Savior because the Scriptures say that we, “**suppress the truth in unrighteousness**” and that is why “**God’s wrath is being revealed.**” (Romans 1:18)
 - 2. **Is 32:2 – “There is a man (King of righteousness, Christ Jesus, from v1) like a refuge from the wind and shelter from the storm...”**
 - a. Jesus Christ is our refuge from the storm of God’s wrath, so that God is shown to be both just and merciful in the same stroke of His cross
 - b. If there be any reason for God’s wrath to be upon you, Christ calls you to come to Him for shelter from the storm of God’s wrath, and He will cover you and protect you, like a shelter keeps off the rain and wind
 - 3. *“Those who are in trouble and distressing fear, if they come to Jesus Christ, have this to ease them of their fears, that Christ has promised them that He will protect them; that they come upon His invitation; that Christ has plighted his faith for their security if they will close to Him; and that he is engaged by covenant to God the Father that he will save those afflicted and distressed souls that come to him...By His own act, he has engaged to be responsible for them; so that if they have exposed themselves to God’s wrath, and to the stroke of justice, it is not their concern, but his, how to answer or satisfy for what they have done. Let there be never so much wrath that they have deserved, they are as safe as if they never had deserved any, because he has undertaken to stand for them.”* (Jonathan Edwards, *Knowing Christ*)

4. If one is “in Christ” by faith, then the Father’s acceptance of the Son must also include His Body as well, being members of Him.
 - a. So His perfect, sinless, God-honoring obedience became ours as well, so there is no danger of God’s wrath upon us and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ
 - b. His resurrection from the dead proves that the Father fully accepts His Son in our stead and has poured out His full and just mercy upon those who cling to Christ in grateful dependence.
5. Come to Christ by faith to be guarded by the peace of God
 - a. If you are not in Christ, fly to Him now for safety from that which terrifies you
 - b. If you are in Christ, but have fallen to fear again in some circumstance, fly to Christ again to find Him a shelter from the wind and the storms
 - i. Doubt of His provision leads us to fear
 - ii. The remedy is the renewed faith to fly to Him as the provision of safety and defense, “When I am afraid, I will trust in you.” (Ps 56:3)
- c. Peace in Christ is a Satisfaction in All Things
 - i. The text says that the peace of God will guard *your hearts*.
 1. The heart is the seat of the desires, the longings, the wants
 2. You see, it is the peace that comes from God which guards our hearts from over-desires, for longings for harmful things, or longings for things too much
 3. Thus, the peace of God is the inner satisfaction of the soul: deep soul rest
 - ii. **Back to Is 32:2, “[The man] will be...channels of water in a dry place...”**
 1. Pictured here is a dry place of the Arabian deserts, parched, sun-baked, cracked-lips.
 - a. Think of the longing you have for water on a hot day, now magnify that into a dry, sandy, arid place like the Arabian desert. This is the kind of craving that is in the background of “dry place”
 - b. When your soul is longing, pining after something that will quench its dry, hardened, fruitless, joyless ground
 2. The Prince of Peace is the channels of water in that place
 - a. not merely a trickle or a drink, but an abundance of multiple streams of clear and running water
 - i. Every reflection upon the majesty and glories of Jesus satisfies the soul and at the same time bids us deeper and deeper to swim in His excellencies
 - iii. How does Jesus satisfy our hearts?
 1. What do we crave for our souls?
 - a. Belonging? – “you are joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17); “in Christ you are all sons of God through faith” (Galatians 3:26)
 - b. Joy? – “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10);
 - c. All the promises which God has made through Christ Jesus are the satisfactions for which our souls were made
 2. When our hearts and minds are stuffed so full of God’s goodness in the gospel of Christ that we don’t even desire the empty things, the “Turkish delight” that would quickly enslave us more than satisfy us.
- d. Peace in Christ is Our Rest From Striving
 - i. **Is 32:2 – “[The man] will be...like the shade of a great rock in a weary land”**
 1. Rest from weariness and striving, from contending and defending, from struggle and the heat of life’s toils brought upon us by sin

- a. The desert is an apt description of our souls when we are trying to prove to God that we are good enough to be accepted by Him
 - b. Often our sin hounds us like the noon-day sun in the desert, haunting us and taunting us, bearing down upon us with feverish power laying low our souls in bitter guilt and fearful desperation
- ii. Coming to Christ in humble trust is find a cure for our guilt and the power of our sin
 - 1. He is like the coolness of shade, the relief from the heat of our guilt and it's threat upon our souls
 - 2. He delivers us from sin's condemnation by becoming the condemnation for us, standing in the heat of God's fiery holy justice, bearing our shame and destruction upon the Cross so that we can sit in His cool righteousness
 - 3. The promise of this good news is that your life can be made new in Christ Jesus, and it can be a life that consists of peace, which comes from God, and is full of deep soul rest
- iii. Coming to Christ also give us rest in the midst of afflictions
 - 1. **Hebrews 2:9-11**
 - 2. What a comfort it is to know that we have a Savior who has suffered afflictions, too, and knows what pain is, even choosing pain in order to bring us into eternal peace and wholeness
 - 3. What a rest, too, to know that Christ brings us into poverty and affliction and suffering and yet He does so in order to walk with us, to be near to us, to graciously reveal to us His excellence and provision and super-abundance so that these sufferings produce an eternal weight of glory

2. This Peace of God Surpasses Our Thoughts

- a. The peace of God in Christ rules over all of our thoughts
 - i. The safety we possess by the substitutionary death and resurrected life of Christ supersedes our fear of danger or our striving after security in other things, whether it be by my own religious performance, or the achievement of some idol (wealth, power, honor, etc.)
 - ii. The satisfaction of the soul in the excellence of Christ supersedes any offer of fulfillment from some lesser object, so that I am completely satisfied in Him and all my thoughts are held captive by this central thought so my longings are not "over-desires" that rule my heart or affections
 - iii. The rest that I find in the deep, deep love of Christ supersedes any attainment or achievement of my own that makes such deceptive offers of rest, so that I have the inner peace and joyful hope in Christ even in the midst of loss or labor
- b. This is the result of our prayers
 - i. note the transition: "but in everything by prayer and petitions let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God..."
 - ii. When we close to Christ in prayer, asking God for the things which we need in the midst of our anxious longings and our fearful joylessness, He brings us near and promises to grant us peace

Conclusion:

William Hendricksen wrote, "Peace is the smile of God reflected in the soul of the believer." God smiles at you who have entrusted yourselves to Christ Jesus. Not because you're great, but because He is gracious. Look, "The Lord is near." This great promise, exemplified and climaxed in the incarnation of the Son of God, the birth of our Savior, Jesus the Christ, is meant to give us joy and the freedom from anxious strivings. We are commanded, therefore, to pray with great hope and with great expectation, not of granted wishes or results that line up with what we think should be, but rather because we are given the expectation of the peace of God.

His deep, sacrificial love gives us peace that He is for us, not against us. And if God is for us, who can stand against us to bring us fear?

His supreme excellence and awesome mercy towards us woos our hearts to satisfaction in His presence, so that our prayers find in Him communion of spirit that calms our fears and brings us instead to the fullness of joy. Bringing our requests to this Great Shepherd of Goodness, who laid down His life for the sheep, the One who was raised from the dead to rule over all things on heaven, on the earth, and under the earth, reveals the green grass of His provision so that we can rest in the coolness of His presence and provision, trusting Him with all things great and small, things too difficult for us. We can sleep because He never does.

The Lord is near. Immanuel, God is with us and for us in Jesus. Let us pray with this promise in mind, that when we close to Him in whatever our need, whatever the imperfection of our faith may be, He has promised to bring His peace to rule our thoughts and guard our hearts and minds with His perfect presence. So, close to Him today. Fly to Jesus for your peace and find in Him safety from the greatest threat, satisfaction for your thirsty soul, and rest from your weary strivings after wind. He is near and He is faithful.