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Living in the Offer of God's Peace

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John 14:23-27 (ESV)

Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

I recently read about a retired couple that was alarmed by the threat of nuclear war. They undertook a serious study of all the inhabited places around the world—on the whole globe—and looked for the most likely place not to experience the threat of nuclear war. Their goal was to determine where in the world they could live that would be the least likely affected place on Earth by nuclear war, a place of ultimate security.

So they studied and traveled, and studied and traveled. Finally, they found the place. On Christmas in 1981—several decades ago—they sent their pastor a card from their Paradise, their new home in the Falkland Islands. It wasn't long after they arrived there that it became a war zone between Great Britain and Argentina. This couple was happy to make it out of there alive.

Their testimony speaks to this reality of human beings: we long for peace—peace in our hearts, peace in our environments. We love to be at rest and in calm. Our whole body stays healthier, more relaxed, less tense, and more able to fight off disease. Our whole beings want to be in a peaceful, alive state.

As a matter of fact, a recent survey—and I mentioned this in last week's CC broadcast—a recent survey of spiritual seekers in the world today, after 2020, revealed that the number one thing they're looking for is forgiveness and the lifting of their shame. People carry around a sense of needing forgiveness. They need the shame of what they know is wrong, before a holy God, forgiven and cleansed.

And number two, at the same level, they long for inner peace. They just want peace. Our hearts long for peace.

King Solomon penned this proverb, recorded for us in Proverbs 17:1. He said this: "Better a dry morsel in peace than great feasting in strife." My wife Chris and I have often used this at marriage retreat gatherings. We say that King Solomon's wisdom teaches this: it is better to be poor with very little food, maybe not even a great home, but to have some shelter and be at peace with each other than to have all the riches of the world, be in great feasting, and live in constant strife and tension. Human beings flourish more when they live in a peaceful, enriched environment and are at peace in their inner being.

We desire this so deeply. It's the great longing of the human heart to live in hope, to live in love, to live in joy, and to live in peace. We were designed to live this way, and we're much healthier when we have these things.

We're talking about living in the gifts of Christmas—living into them, receiving them from God, and learning how to walk in them, unpack them, and have them as a part of our lives. In this series of Advent, as we're looking forward to celebrating the coming of Christ into this world, we also share gifts with one another at this time of year, in line with the wise men bringing Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

But when we think about the true nature of Christmas, friends, it's God who is doing the giving. He's the one blessing the world, sending His Son into the world. It is He who put that star in the sky so that the wise men could travel from afar. Yes, they brought gifts, but they were coming to see the greatest gift ever given: the gift of Jesus, the Messiah, coming into the world to bring you and me not only the gift of forgiveness and salvation, but also the work of bringing us into wholeness with these aspects and virtues of Christ in us—love, joy, hope, and peace. Inner peace.

It's interesting to think of a couple that would move someplace else in the world to try and find a place of peace, only to have it so disrupted by war. You know, one of the most peaceful places on earth for me as a young person, as a child, was growing up on this acreage with my parents. I would go out into the trees that surrounded the acreage—known as a grove—in the wintertime. When it was still and there was snow on the ground, it was so quiet you could hear the birds chirping, the rabbits rustling in the brush. Out there, it just felt so peaceful.

It felt to me like this place would always be peaceful. But then, in April of this year, all of these trees—over 50 trees—were ripped out of my parents' acreage by a tornado. Within three minutes, massive destruction and horrific violence tore through their acreage, decimating almost every building on their land. It destroyed half or more of their home, ripping the innards out of it and leaving the place feeling desolate and almost eerie—more than peaceful.

That is reality, friends. We live in a fallen world, much like it was in Jeremiah's time when he, speaking from the Lord, said, "The people cry for peace, peace, when there is no peace." At least, no lasting peace that this world has to offer us or promise us through our circumstances or through the guarantee of a peaceful environment.

But there is a peace promised to us, friends, and this is a peace that doesn't come from a place but comes to us from the provision of a specific Person. The Apostle Paul knew of this peace. He referred to it as the supernatural peace of God that transcends all understanding, guarding a person's heart and mind.

And here it is—in the person of Christ Jesus. This is a true peace, not found in a place but in the person of Christ. In our gospel text for today, we read of Jesus saying to his followers, "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." This is a transcendent peace from a God who exists in a state of peace, offering his peace to us. He says, "I do not give to you as the world gives." This is something from outside the world, coming from heaven to us.

Isaiah 9:6 prophesied the coming of this person into the world: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end."

Friend, I want to remind you today that there are two kinds of peace the gift of Jesus makes available to anyone in the world—any time, anywhere, at any location. You cannot escape receiving this peace if you desire it and pursue it because it is made available to you and me through the gift of Jesus, poured out on us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As the psalmist said, "If we go to the tops of the mountains, he is there. If we go to the depths of the sea, he is there." We cannot flee from his presence. If we turn to him, open our hearts to him, and—as the Scripture says in 1 Peter—make every effort to enter into this peace, God will bring it to us. There is something supernatural about it, and he wants to bring it to us in two forms, friends.

The first is this: Jesus came into the world to give you and me peace with God. The Bible is quite clear: you and I are born into animosity with God, into a strained relationship with him. As the psalmist says, we are sinful from birth. We have a bent away from him. We don't

naturally turn towards him or trust him. A part of us violates his ways, rebels against him, and creates animosity between us and God.

This is why Jesus was sent into the world—to absorb the wrath, the penalty, and the punishment due to us. He came into the world, turning his face towards Jerusalem, to pay the ultimate price for you and me. This is why Paul writes in Romans 5:1, "We can have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Through his work, his sacrifice, and his atonement for our sins, the forgiveness of sins can be realized.

You and I can rest in our relationship with him, confident in it forever. We can understand that we're secure in his arms and his love. Through Christ, through the righteousness of Christ, through the work of Christ, and through the shed blood of Christ, our sins are forgiven—once and for all: past, present, and future. It doesn't matter what a person has done or will do. If they are in Christ, there is no condemnation for them. They are under the grace of God, the unmerited favor of God, the bountiful, overflowing grace where, as Scripture says, "Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more."

We have peace with God through the gift of Christmas—the gift of Jesus. God sent his Son into the world to pay the penalty for us. As Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:5, "There is one mediator between God and man, Jesus the Messiah, our Lord." And Jesus himself said, "No one comes to the Father except through me."

Oh friend, if you have never opened your heart to the gift of Jesus, turn to him and say, "Oh, I need your forgiveness. Thank you for doing for me what I couldn't do for myself—paying the penalty of sin for me so that I could be forgiven." Turn away from sin; repent from it. Turn toward God and receive the gift of forgiveness so you can have peace with him.

Once we have peace with God, we can step into the next form of peace he has for us—not just relational peace, but a supernatural inner peace that he wants us to walk in: peace from God.

Jesus was speaking of this in John 14:27 when he said to his followers, "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives." Friends, this is something that enters the very deep core of our being. It is something supernatural that can guard our hearts and minds.

Paul wrote about it in Philippians 4, as I mentioned earlier: "The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, with prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests to God. And the peace of God..." When you are surrendered to him and have laid all your burdens before him, "...the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Through the person of Christ, when we trust in him, we have no condemnation, no restriction between us and God, and no more punishment coming our way. We have peace with God.

Then, if we come to him in prayer and learn to walk with him and talk with him, he can guard our hearts and minds. The supernatural peace of God can be planted in us through Christ, by the supernatural work of his Spirit within us.

If we train our minds to be in line with the things of the Spirit, we can literally walk in this supernatural peace, even in the midst of this crazy world. The prophet Isaiah heard it this way from God: He—God Himself, Jesus the Messiah—will keep in perfect and constant peace those whose minds are steadfast, those whose minds are committed to and focused upon him. Isaiah declared that God will keep in perfect peace the minds and hearts that trust and take refuge in him. When we trust in him, we experience an unquenchable hope, a confident expectation, and a supernatural peace.

Paul echoes this in his letter to the believers in Philippi. He says: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." And if we do these things and put them into practice—becoming people of prayer and focusing on the things of God—then, Paul assures us, "the God of peace will be with you."

Oh friends, our world longs for peace, but we are not going to find it circumstantially in this world. It is filled with a violent spiritual war occurring behind the scenes, often manifesting in different ways. The world itself is fallen, and we long for a better place. However, there is a peace available—peace with God and a supernatural peace from him that we can walk in, even in the midst of this crazy world.

When we know this peace, God calls us to do something more with it. When we have a peaceful relationship with him and no animosity between us, we are to work to live this way with every other human being. He inspired Paul to write: "As much as it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

Beyond that, God also calls us to seek the peace and well-being of the cities where we live. Through the prophet Jeremiah, and later echoed by Paul in his letter to Timothy, we are reminded to pray to the Lord on behalf of the communities and environments where we dwell. Jeremiah 29:7 says: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

Paul expands on this in his first letter to Timothy, writing in chapter 2: "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority—that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

When people are at rest and the Spirit comes to speak to them, they are in an environment where they can hear. In such peace, more and more will respond to the great offering of God's love, given to all people through the gift of Jesus.

Father, thank you for loving us so much that you brought us this supernatural gift of peace with you, through the forgiveness available in your Son, Jesus. Thank you also for the supernatural peace that we can walk in by the power of your Spirit. It's in Jesus' name we pray and give you thanks, praise, honor, and glory. In his name we pray. Amen.