

Peace

Luke 2.13-14; John 16.33; Eph.2.12-22; Phil 4.4-7.

Too often we think of peace as an absence of activity as when someone comes home from work and flops into an armchair or a war ends and combatants go home. It was in this sense that the poor overworked old washerwoman, thinking of heaven, said "No more work. Not now. Not never. I'm going to do nothing for ever and ever." But the Bible meaning of "peace" is much different from that – positive not negative.

Years ago I went to Odhams printing works in Watford. At that time it printed the majority of the weekly magazines. The gigantic machine was about 200 yards long and 30 feet high. At one end, high up, were gigantic rolls of paper. At the other end came out magazines neatly printed, stapled, folded and stacked. It was all very impressive and tremendously noisy. Men stood at various points watching over it all. At one moment there was a great clanking sound and everything stopped – except the men.

They were thrown into a frenzy of activity to find out what had gone wrong and put it right. After about half an hour they had put it to rights and the whole colossal process, with all its noise, began again. The men stood by again, smiling and at peace.

Had you asked the workers what peace was they would certainly not have said it was when all the work and noise stopped and the machines stood silent. They would have said it was when everything was running smoothly and rightly fulfilling what it was made to do.

Peace is not the absence of activity but the harmonious running of life, amid all its demands and clatter, when it is doing what God made and meant it to be and do.

Peace was – and is – the gift of Jesus to His followers (Cf. John 20.19). But note that with the gift of peace came His call to mission – to go and spread His word and His peace everywhere (v.21) whatever it cost them – and it did cost them much including their lives.

Ephesians (2.13-17) speaks of the old hostility of Jews and gentiles and says that Christ has made believers of both sides one: He is their peace. And anyone who has been to an international gathering of Christians will have felt that unity and peace. Would that the whole world would know Jesus and His peace.

To pursue peace is to build up one another in fellowship (Rom.14.19) for God is the God and the Giver of peace, that inner peace which passes all understanding (Phil.4.7, 9; Rom. 15.33; 1 Cor.15.33; 2 Cor. 13.11). Peace is a fruit which grows in the life of those who walk with Jesus Christ (Gal.22) and open their hearts and lives to Him daily.

Questions for discussion:

1. Look again at Jesus' promise in John 16.33. How can you have trouble and peace at the same time?
2. What experience of God's peace have you had in a time of trouble? Share.
3. What has come home to you most strongly in our study today?
4. What would you have said to the poor overworked old washerwoman who thought heaven would just be doing nothing for ever?
5. Every nation today thinks that to maintain peace it must be stronger, more powerful and more heavily armed than any other nation. Do you think this can really lead to peace? Why do they think like this?
6. If God is both perfect and just how can He accept sinful people like us? Do you think Ephesians 2.14-15 gives us the answer?
7. How can so many different races with so many different ways ever live together in peace on this earth? Do you think there is a clue in the very different characters Jesus called together to be His disciples?