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Peace, Perfect Peace

*Peace, perfect peace,
in this dark world of sin:
The blood of Jesus
whispers peace within.*

*Peace, perfect peace,
by thronging duties pressed:
To do the will of Jesus
this is rest.*

*Peace, perfect peace,
with sorrows surging round:
On Jesus' bosom
naught but calm is found.*

*It is enough;
earth's struggles soon shall cease,
And Jesus call us to heav'n's perfect peace*

WORDS: Edward H. Bickersteth (w. 1875)

MUSIC: George T. Caldbeck (w 1877)



The Church: The Mystery of God

Riots, racial unrest, anti-war protests, assassinations, hateful rhetoric... No, I'm not writing about today's society. I'm writing about America in the 1960's. Anyone over the age of 60 can attest to the anxiety that our nation faced as we wondered if our country could survive the deep divisions in our society. We wondered how our nation could ever be healed and brought together again. What was the solution to bring about peace and unity for a divided society?

The apostle Paul talked about God's solution for a divided society in Ephesians 3:4-6: "In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." (NIV)

In the society Paul lived in, there was **deep** division—deeper than we have in America today: Slave/Master, Rich/Poor, Male/Female—but especially Jew/Gentile. The Jew/Gentile division was a sharp division! They would not go to each other's homes. They would not eat together. They thought of each other as less worthy. They purposely segregated themselves and certainly would not want their children to marry someone of the other group! How could such separate, antagonistic groups ever be brought together?!

God's answer was Jesus Christ and His church! One of the great mysteries of God was the "specialness" of the church. The church was the one group where all were welcomed: Slave/Free, Rich/Poor, Male/Female, Jew/Gentile, Israelite/Roman Citizen. All people from all cultural, economic, racial, ethnic, and social strata were brought together in one body—to become brothers and sisters...to become family! They were brought together to become a special witness to the world. "You are the light of the world!" It is no surprise that there are so many "one another" passages in the New Testament...they were needed!

In today's society, God's answer for division, discord, and violence is **still** the church! The world will **never** provide an answer for hatred and prejudice, but **God** will! The church of Christ is still the expression of God's wisdom, where all people are brought together to love one another. Paul continued to write: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2-4a). In the body of Christ, we bear all things, we share all things, we believe all things, we hope all things, we persevere through all things!

Even though Biblical Christians are becoming a greater minority in our country today, let us not forget the power and wisdom displayed in the body of Christ—the Mystery of God. You **are** the Light of the World!

Andy Cassidy (Elder), Rolla, Missouri

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Master, the Tempest is Raging!

The world as we knew it in September, 2020, was not a peaceful world. Everything seemed to be upside down. Violence and looting were no longer the exception; they were the order of the day. As our American way of life seemed to be totally falling apart, many of us experienced concern, even fear.

One day as I was driving home and listening to the radio, I found myself becoming very tense and unsettled, thinking circumstances were totally crazy. It was a state I could not allow myself to dwell on or remain in, so I turned off the radio. In the silence, the following words ran through my mind, "Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world..." Not all the words came to me, but I sang what I could of that song all the way home. That simple exercise calmed my mind and enabled me to cope with the day.

In Mark 4 on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, such a large crowd gathered to hear Jesus that he got into a boat and sat down to teach them. After a long day of teaching the crowd and his disciples, Jesus was very tired and fell asleep in the stern on a pillow. A dreadful storm beset them, but Jesus slept peacefully.

The disciples found themselves in a terrifying situation. Though most of them had been professional fishermen on the Sea of Galilee for most of their lives, they were terrified. Rather crankily, he woke Jesus saying, "*Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?*" (Mark 4:38). There was a storm in their lives. He stilled the storm when he said, "*Peace, be still!*" The song, for which this article is titled, is one of my favorites.

Christians have access to the throne of God as we prostrate ourselves before our King and pour out our hearts to Him. Someone going through a medical crisis finds peace in their storm of fear and uncertainty. Someone in isolation rests in the peace of being in God's presence in prayer and by spending time in His word. The disciples were terrified in the boat while the storm raged, and Jesus brought calm and peace to them. He can and will still the storms in our hearts and lives. Lean on Him in *your* storm!

In our song books, "Songs of Faith and Praise," there are almost a hundred songs in the section titled Christian Assurance. A few of the titles are:

A Shelter in Time of Storm
Be Not Dismayed Whate'er Betide

Because He Lives
Does Jesus Care?
It is Well with My Soul
Peace, Perfect Peace
There is a Place of Quiet Rest
We Have an Anchor

Peace is something we crave. Peace of mind is a gift from our Father who loves us so very much that He allowed His Son to die in our stead. Though life as we now know it may fade into a distant memory, we know we belong to Him. We can have peace of mind. May we all keep our focus on Him to get us through all difficult times.

Evelyn Waite, Rolla, Missouri

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Peace

Peace is very precious to me. Every Christian should enjoy total peace in their lives. Jesus promised peace to us. Our first need is salvation; our second greatest need is peace. Jesus provides both. John 14:27, "*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.*" We must trust these words to have peace. Peace, I fear, is not enjoyed by many Christians today. Being wrapped up in this life and living as though this is our only home will not bring peace.

On the evening of the first day of the week that Jesus arose, His disciples were gathered behind locked doors. Can you imagine what they were thinking and feeling? They must have been in shock. They had followed Jesus for three years. They walked and ate with Him. They listened to His teachings and watched Him perform miracles, even raising some from the dead. Three of them watched His transfiguration on the mountain. They believed Him to be the Messiah they had waited for centuries. Now their leader had died on a cruel cross. The women went to the tomb and saw His body laid in it. They saw the stone that sealed the tomb. Now they heard the news that He is alive, and they cannot believe it! Suddenly, Jesus is standing among them. His first words to them were, "*Peace be with you!*"

Jesus knew that peace was what they needed most. Their world had been rocked, and they likely did not know what to do next. Can you imagine the fear they experienced? They had been through several days and nights of nightmarish events. Jesus repeatedly tried to prepare them for His imminent death, but they just could not understand the nature of His Kingdom. We may be the same, especially if we live for this life only.

I use a devotional book at home that is written as though Jesus is speaking directly to me. It personalizes His message. During a time when I was struggling physically, it spoke amazingly directly to me. "Thank me for the

conditions that are requiring you to 'be still.' Do not spoil these quiet hours by wishing them away, waiting impatiently to be active again. Some of the greatest works in My Kingdom have been done from sick beds and prison cells. Instead of resenting the limitation of a weakened body, search for My Way in the midst of these circumstances. Limitations can be liberating when your strongest desire is living close to me.

"Quietness and trust enhance your awareness of My Presence with you. Do not despise these simple ways of serving me. Although you feel cut off from the activity of the world, your quiet trust makes a powerful statement in spiritual realms. My strength and power show themselves most effective in weakness." Those words are based on 2 Corinthians 12:9: *"My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness."*

We live in a fallen world. Every day we are faced with disease, sorrow, and heartache as well as evil, war, and death. We can't escape it while we live here. But we can have *peace*, even in the middle of all that is bad. In the words of Jesus in John 16:33, *"I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Peace is among the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. In the words of Paul in Philippians 4:6-7, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* A quote on Facebook using this verse said, "If you aren't prioritizing prayer, not only are you missing out on blessings, but you are seriously missing out on peace." So true!

Peace must be practiced. If we practice anxiety and worry all our lives, it will be hard to begin practicing peace. Anxiety and worry are addictions. Like any addiction or habit, it will be hard to break. But we can do it! Jesus said we must, and with His help we can! Isaiah 41:10, *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*

Mary Anna Melton, Rolla, MO



Seek Peace and Pursue It (1 Peter 3:11)

Do you waste time worrying and wondering? Worry leads to sleepless nights; cranky attitudes come with worry. I am tired of wasting time not living in peace, so I make a concerted effort to live God's peace in my life. It isn't easy. Satan plants discouragement over the known or fear of the unknown! 1 Peter 3:10-11 says to seek peace and pursue it. How do we claim peace in our lives? To *seek* is to search

with *expectation* of finding, (think lost keys). Read God's word daily; practice peace.

In Financial Peace University, one of Dave Ramsey's illustrations is the gazelle in Proverbs 6:5: *"Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler."* Gazelles' fiercest predators are cheetahs. Cheetahs can run faster than gazelles; but with sheer determination, gazelles escape 18 out of 19 times! "We need to run like our life depends on it...away from debt," says Ramsey. I say, "Run with all your might away from unrest. Run to peace!" God intends peace for us (John 14:27).

Are you haunted by stress, unrest? Free yourself like a gazelle from a cheetah. Satan hunts for what hurts or haunts us. Jesus says, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* John 10:10. What steals your peace? What triggers fear in you?

Practical ways to run after peace:

#1 Practice peace. Distractions consume our thoughts. Being in a hurry steals our peace. Inventorying our faults brings only despair, not humility. Distractions come in many forms—lost jobs, troubled marriages, financial problems, health issues, grief, misbehaving children, general disappointments. Our worth is *not* measured by our productivity. Regular time in God's word pursuing peace centers our minds on Him. When your heart is troubled, don't give in! Fight by pursuing peace!

#2 Guard your thoughts. We have heard, "You bring about what you think about." *"The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace."* Romans 8:6. Dwelling on circumstances, people, and possessions enslaves us to the flesh. Setting our minds on the things of God and His word brings new perspectives of circumstances, people, and possessions that don't control our joy. We can be at peace even in the midst of the storm.

We can imagine confusing things (Proverbs 23:33) if we are under the influence of fear and anxiety. Most things we worry about never come to pass. **Think what God thinks!** (Philippians 4:8). Practice peace with gazelle intensity. Use sheer determination to outwit your fiercest predator! What we believe becomes our reality. Tell Satan, as Jesus did, "Get behind me, get away from me, get out of my head. Jesus is my Savior, and God is my peace." Practice peace. Refuse to entertain negative thoughts! *Colossians 3:2: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."*

#3 Fill worry time/void time with prayer! Speaking scripture aloud brings power and peace. Recite, *"This is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it."* When you wake in the night with fear or worry, talk to Him. Stay in

peace by trusting God. It is not up to us to fix things we cannot change. *Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* Think good thoughts. Pray!

A friend of mine applied for a new job. She was required to pass a test. She got 87% but was told she had to score 90% to pass. That same day, she took an even harder test—and failed it. She had to take the test again the next morning. If she failed this time, she would not get the job. Knowing she was not a good test taker, it looked bleak.

We prayed for God's intervention. Others were praying, too. All she could do was her best. We prayed for God's will to be done. If that door closed, she would figure out something else.

A text message later that day said, "I not only passed! I scored 100%!" She praises God and is filled with gratitude to God. Be thankful for all things and reap peace, for God is always working behind the scenes. He knows what we cannot see. May we be patient as we wait for God's work.

#4 Gratitude. *Colossians 3:15-16: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body, you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit singing to God with gratitude in your hearts."*

We are called to peace. "Called," especially in the book of Isaiah, is the idea of naming, election, ownership, and appointment. Take ownership of peace. God has appointed us to be at peace, feel peace, know peace, be ruled by peace. We must seek peace and pursue it with gazelle intensity using the weapons of peace and gratitude to outwit our fiercest predator.

Be thankful and praise God, even for the trials. Habakkuk struggled to understand God's goodness in the midst of evil and injustice in the world. *"How long Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?"* God answered, *"Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. Look and be amazed."*

Habakkuk continued complaining about injustices and evil. Later he said, *"Lord, I stand in awe of your deeds."* Then came more challenges and bad things. In Habakkuk 3:16-18, he concedes, *"I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,*

though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my savior." Let us also be thankful and amazed even though our dream may not be fulfilled in this lifetime!

Scientists using two study groups explored the effects of gratitude on emotions, minds, and bodies. One group kept a daily journal of things they were thankful for. The other group documented things that annoyed them. Those who kept thankfulness journals experienced greater enthusiasm and energy for life. Those who kept annoyance journals did not.

Observing others who have it worse is not enough. That is a step toward gratitude, but you must take the next step and *show thankfulness* for it to impact you. Researchers in this study found that those who kept gratitude journals improved in their attitude toward life and experienced improvement in exercise patterns and reduction in physical ailments, including aches and pains.

Scientists are discovering the transformative power of saying, "thank you!" The Bible has been teaching these principles for thousands of years. God doesn't *need* us to be thankful; rather, He calls us to open our hearts and minds to all He has provided for us. We thank God, not for the bad situation but for His presence in the middle of that situation. According to Feinberg, "Saying thanks becomes a powerful act of faith that shifts our focus from the circumstances to the One who holds all things together."

Peace is ours for the taking, no matter the circumstances surrounding us. Praise God for all the wonderful life lessons He gives us. Praising Him places value, worth, and gratitude for all He has done and will do for us—even if the answers are not what we hoped to get.

Pursue peace with gazelle intensity. Close your eyes, breathe in God's peace, and exhale the worries of life.

Connie Erisman, Rolla, MO

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