

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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PEACE TOWARD MEN OF GOOD WILL (2)

Luke 2:14

You will remember that in our last lesson, we were talking about the message of the angels found in Luke 2:14. The angels gave glory to God and they said in that verse, *On earth peace among men with whom He is pleased*. Peace toward men of good will.

Studying spiritual laws

In that lesson, we spoke about peace and we explored one spiritual principle of peace. The principle was that in the Scriptures, peace and righteousness always go together. You cannot pull them apart. This means that where there is no righteousness, there will be no peace. Only where there is righteousness and holiness, will there be peace. If this world wants to find peace, it is to be found in the holy Word of God.

That is the first principle of peace, the first spiritual law regarding peace. Today I want to share with you two other laws regarding peace. You know, we study what we call in Chinese *oolee*, the laws of matter, which is called physics. But I want to talk to you about *linglee*, the laws of the spirit, the laws of the spiritual life. We study physics in order to be able to understand how material things work in this world so that we may harness its power, so that we may be able to make better use of the material world in which we live. But as Christians, we also want to study *linglee*, the spiritual laws, so that we learn how to harness spiritual power, the power that comes from above, for the benefit of the kingdom of God.

Second spiritual law of peace

So the second spiritual law regarding peace is this. That peace is found only in Christ. Peace is found only in Christ. You see that this second principle is closely related to the first one in the sense that Christ is our peace because He is our righteousness. And by saying that, we also imply that we cannot separate peace and righteousness. Let me explain. In Ephesians 2:14, it says that Christ is *our peace*. But in 1Corinthians 1:30, we read that Christ is our *righteousness and our sanctification*. Christ is our peace. Christ is our righteousness. You see, He is our peace because He is our righteousness and our sanctification.

To say that Christ became our peace and our sanctification is a profound spiritual truth and I want to spend some time to explain it. How did Jesus become our peace? We read these beautiful words that you probably know in Isaiah 53:5. *The chastisement for our peace was upon Him* (i.e. Jesus), *and by His stripes we are healed*. What does that mean, *the chastisement for our peace*? It

means that Jesus was chastised in order to secure our peace. He suffered in order to establish peace for us.

The chastisement for our peace was upon Jesus. He was the only one who could make this possible. As sinners, we are all condemned never to have any peace. There is no hope that we shall ever have peace. But this is the beauty of it. That Jesus came to establish peace for us. He came to make it possible for the sinner to become righteous and so to have peace. That's why it says that the chastisement for our peace was upon Jesus.

You see, there is no way you can jump over this spiritual law. You cannot give peace to the sinner unless you also give him righteousness. You must have righteousness in order to have peace. And Jesus is the answer to the restless sinner. That's why I said that He is our peace because He is our righteousness.

This second law stands eternally and it is precisely the explanation why Jesus had to die. Unless He accepted this chastisement, unless He accepted the penalty for sin, there would never be peace for anyone. We could not have peace. We would be condemned to restlessness, condemned to perish.

But the Lord Jesus secured this peace for us. How? By His cross. That is what chastisement there means. By His cross, He made peace for us. Colossians 1:20 says that Jesus *made peace through the blood of His cross*.

Salvation involves a radical transformation

Now that's only one part of salvation. And unfortunately, today we tend to preach about salvation so as to emphasize only forgiveness. Forgiveness is wonderful and fundamental to salvation. But if you only mention that, that's not full salvation.

You see, if Jesus' death on the cross is only a legal work by which He cancels out our debts, our sins, then that righteousness is still external to us. And if that righteousness is external to us, then the peace that comes with it is also external to us. And that's not full salvation.

Take a criminal who is found guilty for whatever crime that he had committed. And you say, 'All right, I will pay the penalty of his crime, of his sin.' Then he will be acquitted, he will be forgiven. Legally speaking, he moves from the position of being guilty to being acquitted. He is in a new legal position. That's a wonderful position for a criminal to be in. He is now a free man. But let me ask this question. 'What about himself? He is still a criminal! Would you let that man out on the street again? He is still a danger for the society. The crimes that he committed before, he can and will commit again, unless a drastic change happens in his character.' But the sad reality is that a criminal rarely changes and he will be back in the courtroom on the next charge. That's not a very happy situation to be in.

From the spiritual point of view, if there is no change in the very nature of the sinner, that person will continue to commit the sins that he committed before, even if he is now declared to be righteous before God, which is also called justification. By the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross, yes, we are legally declared to be righteous and therefore, justified before God. But that's not full salvation. Otherwise we would just be like this criminal who is acquitted but continues to commit his crimes. Salvation is more than just a declaration of righteousness. God transforms us and makes us righteous. The Bible tells us that to be saved is to be made into a new person. A total transformation is involved. If any man be in Christ, he is changed. If Christ is your righteousness and peace, it means that you are changed into a new person. You are not the sinner that you were anymore. That's the beauty of salvation.

In the words of the OT, it says that God gives us a new heart. There is a spiritual heart transplant. Ezekiel says that God will plant into us a new heart. He will take the stony heart out of me and put a new heart of flesh into me, a heart that is alive. The dead one is taken out; a living one is put in. We are totally transformed by God. We are made righteous. And as the apostle John says in his first letter, whoever has been born of God does not continue to commit sin. The new nature in you does not continue in sin.

Struggling against sin

This transformation is a process. We don't become totally holy in one day. From time to time, we do struggle. And the struggle is against sin. The writer to the Hebrews says in his letter, *In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* That is to say, you have not completed your struggle. We are fighting against sin day by day. Paul says that we are not yet perfect. In Philippians 3, he says, *Not as though I am already perfect, but I press towards the mark.*

This means that sometimes in our struggle with sin, we will find that our peace is being disturbed. If we allow sin to creep into our life, we are going to lose that inner peace. The external peace will remain because our reconciliation with God stands. But the inner peace is lost because of sin within. When we let something unholy to have a place in our life, we will lose the peace to which we have a right in Christ.

That is why we must ever depend upon the Holy Spirit to constantly bring that holiness and that peace into our lives. He is the Holy Spirit. And He is also the Spirit of peace, peace being a fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22.

Third spiritual law of peace

Now let's look at the third spiritual law. The first spiritual principle of peace is that peace can never be separated from righteousness. The second principle is that peace can only be found in Christ. The third principle is this. Righteousness is bound to be opposed by wickedness. Or put it in another way, it means that good and evil are irreconcilable opposites. They can never be reconciled. You can never put good and evil together, neither in the same person, nor in the same world. These are two powers that cannot both stand at the same time. They will always be in conflict. And one or the other must fall.

That is why you can never have peace if you allow righteousness and wickedness to co-exist in your life. That is why also that the requirement in the Scriptures for discipleship is a total commitment to God. James exhorts us not be a double-minded person who is partially in the light and partially in the dark (James 1:8; 4:8). Such a person lives in utter wretchedness.

A true Christian has chosen once and for all where he stands. Just as Joshua said to the Israelites, If God be God, then serve Him. But if the idols are your gods, if Baal is your god, then you serve him (Joshua 24:14-15). But don't stand in between and try to serve both. If money is your god, you go and serve money. But if the living God is your God, you serve the living God. Don't try to do both. You cannot serve God and mammon at the same time (Matthew 6:24).

So the third principle of peace in the Scriptures is that good and evil can never co-exist. They will always be in struggle against each other. Now here is a warning. If you keep these two things in your life, then your life will become a battlefield. You know, the opposite of peace is war. If you allow righteousness and wickedness to co-exist, then you are going to turn your life into a war zone. And many Christians' lives have been ruined because of this.

Do you really want your life to be a battlefield over good and evil? I exhort you to decide once and for all where you stand. Say to God, 'Lord, by your grace, here I stand and I will stand firm.' Paul says, 'Stand fast in the full armour of God.' Don't ever compromise with evil.

Driving out evil

Now understand that the world in which we live, there will never be peace. If you understand the third principle of peace, you know why. Because in this world, there is evil. And evil is struggling with good. No matter what the politicians say, no matter what anybody else will do, there will always be war in this world. Because there will always be evil in this world until that time when God's kingdom reigns upon the earth and wipes out all evil from the earth.

The problem with world peace is that you cannot drive out evil by human power. You can try military power. You can try economic power. You can try intellectual power. You can try all that, but you realize in the end that nothing will work to bring peace permanently. There is just no way you can establish peace in this world because man does not have the means to drive out evil. We may have an absence of war for a time, perhaps because nobody is strong enough to beat the other guy down. But when the balance is broken, you can expect war again. This is the sad side of the history of mankind.

In John 14:27, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, *My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you*. The peace that I give to you is not the peace that the world can offer. What I offer is eternal. The peace that the world offers can only be temporary because man has no means to deal with evil. He can make very powerful bombs. But he simply cannot make any weapon that can fight evil. This brings us back to the second spiritual law. Only in Christ will there be peace. *My peace I give to you*. Only Christ has the power to cope with evil. If you want to do something about peace in this world, you have to begin with the message of the gospel.

I came to bring a sword

Now, in Matthew 10:34, the Lord Jesus says something that seems to contradict the message of the angels. There He says, *Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword*. That statement on the surface seems to be a direct contraction to what the angels said in Luke 2:14. But if you look at these two verses closely, you will see that it is not quite so. Let me explain what I mean.

Remember the message of the angels. *Peace on earth to men in whom God is pleased*. Not just peace on earth. Anyone who quotes the Scriptures like this is distorting the Scriptures. The Bible never promises peace on earth, but peace on earth to men of good will, men in whom God is pleased, men who love righteousness.

The Lord Jesus said that He did not come to bring peace into the world. Because His coming into the world, in fact, intensifies the conflict against evil. And therefore, He doesn't come to bring peace, but the sword. You remember the third spiritual law? Good and evil cannot be reconciled. If you understand that spiritual law, then you will understand what the Lord Jesus is saying. When Jesus, the Righteous One, comes into the world, the conflict between good and evil becomes even fiercer. The greater power of good has come into the world.

The reason why the conflict becomes even fiercer is because, as the Lord Jesus says in John 3:19, *men loved darkness rather than light*. The tendency of people in the world is that they prefer darkness. That is why there can never be peace. So long as men are not changed, we will never be able to change the situation in the world. It is no use to try to change a country without changing its people. You can change its economic condition. You can change its military balance. You can change its

educational position. But so long as man himself is basically a sinner, i.e. basically evil, even though he is an educated sinner, or a wealthy sinner, or whatever kind of sinner, he is still a sinner.

And because of that, there will never be peace on earth until God's kingdom comes. That's what we pray for. *Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10). When man's evil will no longer be done, then there will be peace. And God's will will be done on earth.

So what is our position as Christians in the light of this third spiritual law? Our position is simply this. Understand that as Christians, we are bound to suffer in the world. Because the more righteous you are, the brighter is your light, the more you will face opposition and bitterness and persecution. And thank God for that. That means to say, you are counting for good, you are standing on the side of good, and you are disturbing evil.

Peace to those who love the law of God

In closing, let me read to you a beautiful verse in the OT that makes reference to peace. And it is in Psalm 119:165. *Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble*. Peace is given to those who love God's law. And we are told more specifically what God's law is in the previous verse, in v. 164. *Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous ordinances*. God's law are His 'righteous ordinances.' This means to say that anyone who loves God's law is a person who loves righteousness. That is why he has great peace. The person who loves righteousness and hates iniquity is a person who has great peace. Make it your aim, by the grace of God, to love righteousness. And then you will find God's peace flooding into your heart.

So this is the message of the angels. *My peace I give to you*, to men with whom I am pleased, to men and women who love righteousness.