

Peace (Remembrance Sunday)

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[0 : 00] Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Quite a few years ago now, a couple on retirement decided they wanted to live in the most peaceful place and the most secure place that they could find.

They were particularly worried about the threat of nuclear war and so they undertook a research project to find the place on the planet that they felt stood the greatest chance of being most secure and most peaceful.

After many months of research, they eventually found a place. It was rather remote, but they felt that it seemed very, very secure.

Secure and as likely to be full of peace as anywhere else on the planet. And so it was that Christmas 1981, they sent a Christmas card to the minister of the church, the place where they had left, from the Falkland Islands.

[1 : 24] Of course, it was only a matter of months later before war broke out. And that story serves to remind us that no matter how hard we may try to find a place of absolute peace in this world, given the structures within which we live, we will probably never be able to find somewhere where we can say we are with absolute certainty.

Here is peace. Not this side of eternity anyway. Of course, that does not mean for one moment that we should give up the pursuit of peace, the very opposite.

The peace that Christ gives us is a peace that inspires, that sends us out, that tells us that we must do everything we can to pursue peace.

But let's be clear. This side of eternity, the world groans. This side of eternity, war continues to rage around us and, of course, within us.

But Jesus says, peace I give you, my peace I give you, not as the world gives. That's important, because what Jesus is talking about here is something that is unique.

[2 : 48] It's like nothing else. Remember that Jesus said this knowing that he was going to the cross. And yet, even with that knowledge that he would suffer the most horrific death, he was able to speak with conviction of a peace like no other.

And it is that peace that he offers us. So strong and so uniquely robust is this peace that Jesus is able to say, therefore, do not let your hearts be troubled.

Think about that. How easy, how realistic is it to honestly speak of don't let your hearts be troubled. how can you make that happen?

Well, you can't. And here's an experiment. Hold out your hand, your right hand. And now swing it around, so it's like that. And now with your left hand, I invite you to take hold of your middle finger and fold it into the palm of your hand.

So you're holding it down like that. And now place that on your chest. Now, I'm going to ask you a number of questions. If you could make all your problems go away, then just lift your thumb up.

[4 : 18] I mean, right now. Just lift the thumb up. Give it a little wiggle. I kind of thought if you could just do anything to make all the problems go away, yeah, you probably would answer that in the positive. Okay, now let's move on to your first finger, okay?

If you could just eliminate all worries and stresses that you have, then just wiggle that finger at me now. I thought that might be the case.

Okay. Let's move to the little finger. The little finger. Imagine you were offered to have a personal servant, somebody who was with you always, 24-7 for the rest of your life, to do absolutely everything, to take care of every last job that you had.

They were there always, in the background, not in your way, but just there to help out with anything and everything. Just lift your little finger if you wish you could have that. I thought that might be the case. Now we come to the ring finger.

That's the one left that I haven't asked you to do anything with yet. In my bag over there, I've got 10,000 pounds. If you'd like it, just lift that finger now. Okay, I didn't think, I didn't think you'd want it. [5 : 29] I was lying about the money, by the way, but hold your hand in that position for just a moment and think about this. Think about that command.

Don't let your hearts be troubled. Imagine that's me telling you right now. Don't let your hearts be troubled. Now try and lift that finger. Yeah? That's what it's like.

That human effort to strive to just eliminate all human tension. You can't do it. Really try hard to raise that.

It's what it's like when you try of your own human resource to just not be afraid. Now you can relax your hand.

We'll come back to that in a moment. So what are we to do? How do we make sense of those words of Jesus? You know, his words there are as profound, as empowering, as they are simple.

[6 : 37] But simple does not mean easy. See, Jesus gives us a hint as to, more than a hint, as to how we're to do this. How we're to not let ourselves be troubled or afraid.

He gives us a hint in the words that precede those last words in that passage. When he says, and remember he's speaking here to the disciples, this is the first generation of Christian believers. He says that the Holy Spirit will teach you and will help you to remember. The Holy Spirit will teach you the things that I've said to you, says Jesus, and the Holy Spirit will help you to remember what I've said to you.

In other words, as he says these words of promise to his earliest disciples, he's talking about the Bible that is still in the process of being written at that time. Those written words that they did not have but we do.

Those written words that Jesus knew we would need for the generations. Those written words which we can now have access to to keep the teachings of Jesus alive.

[7 : 48] The Holy Spirit, Jesus says, the Holy Spirit that will come will teach you and will enable you to remember my words. That means that when we read Jesus' words, we can be confident that they are Jesus' words.

they are God's words given to us in Scripture for our time here on earth. That we might encounter that relationship, that only relationship that can bring us peace.

It doesn't eliminate our problems. It doesn't immunize us from struggles and pains. but it gives us a peace that is unique.

It means two things. Firstly, when we read these words of Jesus in the Bible, first, we've got to trust them. And that's not easy but it's what we're called to do.

Secondly, and this is a word that's not particularly fashionable or popular, we've got to obey them. Now we don't like the word obey, we wince at it because it sounds like mindless submission.

[9 : 10] It's not. When we think, when we talk about obeying the word of God, it's about allowing it to have authority over our lives.

You see, we can read the Bible but when we submit to its authority we find that it has this uncanny habit of reading us.

Now put out your hand again. Take hold of that little middle finger there and bend it down, swing it round, place it onto your chest back in the same position.

Now once more I ask you to try to lift that ring finger. Now don't try too hard because you might cause yourself an injury but just in that state of tension that's what it's like when we try to bring ourselves some sense of peace humanly speaking.

We just can't eliminate. We can't actually save ourselves. Now with your left hand take hold of that finger.

[10 : 23] only God can do this. I invite you to lift not too far or you will hurt yourself but lift that finger off your chest and hold it there for a moment.

When we accept the authority of God's word when we allow the word of Jesus Christ into our lives when we turn to him knowing that he is the only one that can bring that peace that is beyond understanding he lifts us not of our own strength but in his.

Let's pray together. Lord thank you that you do not just leave us in this world to get on with things but that you come to us in Jesus that you come to us in Jesus and by the power of your Holy Spirit you continue to speak to us some 2,000 years on through your word.

Lord help us whatever we are going through in our lives right now whatever is stopping us from having peace for whatever is troubling our hearts help us to turn to turn to you and to know the power of your Holy Spirit to know the power of your word Lord would you lift us would you help us to have that peace that is uniquely yours not of our own strength but of yours help us to know that peace help us to grow in that peace this day and in the time to come in Jesus name Amen