

# With God, there is peace

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Preacher: Mark Chew

- [ 0 : 00 ]     Now, I often get asked what I would like for my birthday. And that's because I'm one of those difficult people for which it's really hard to work out presents for.
- And often my first thought, because that's what I truly want, is to think peace and quiet. Now, of course, I rarely say that to anyone.
- Although, now that I've said it, you all know. And you can try and buy me that this year if you want. But it's not easy, is it? Because it's not something that money can buy.
- And also, it's sort of a veiled criticism, isn't it, to those who ask. Because it implies that the only way for them to give it to me is to stop fighting among themselves.
- Well, I may be just getting old, but the thought of it, peace and quiet, just sounds beautiful, doesn't it?
- [ 1 : 03 ]     I can't even hear it now. And yet, all around us, it seems so elusive.
- The war in Ukraine hasn't even ended, for example. And what do we hear of now? Other conflicts, like the one in Sudan, springing up. And with it comes death, homelessness, families torn apart, destruction.
- So what hope is there for true peace? Well, I think the psalm today gives us a vision of it. And the answer is that with God, there is peace.
- There is true and everlasting peace. In fact, as we will soon see, it's only with God that there is true and lasting peace.
- And yet, if that's true, then why hasn't God brought this about? Well, let's look at the psalm to find out. And beginning with verse 1, we read, Now, although it may not look immediately obvious, the first clue that what we have here is a picture of peace is actually the name or location of God's dwelling.
- [ 2 : 33 ]     You see, Salem, which is short for Jerusalem, actually means peace in Hebrew. It's where we get the modern Hebrew word shalom from.
- Now, the psalmist could have easily just referred to Zion as Jerusalem, but instead he opts for Salem to signify that Zion is a place of peace. That there's peace because God dwells in Zion.
- Hence, with God's presence, there is peace. Now, of course, that's not the reality in history with Jerusalem. Often, we see this city of David besieged, attacked by Israel's enemies.
- Yet, in this psalm, in this vision, it successfully repels its enemies. The flashing arrows are broken, as are the other weapons of war.
- And all of this is due to God. God, who has declared this to be his dwelling place, has kept Salem safe. Now, who is this God?
- [ 3 : 36 ]     It is the God of Israel, who is renowned throughout Judah, whose name and reputation is great in Israel. In other words, it's Israel's God who dwells in Zion.

But the psalmist now goes on to elaborate on the reason for God's renown, and as a consequence, the reasons for peace where God dwells. First, God provides security and peace because of his power.

So, verse 4, You are radiant with light, more majestic than mountains, rich with game. The valiant lie plundered. They sleep their last sleep. Not one of the warriors can lift his hands.

At your rebuke, God of Jacob, both horse and chariot lie still. Now, I think the you here is a reference to the city of Zion, although its attributes owe themselves to God's presence.

It's almost as if with God in Zion, God and Zion are the one. Thus, the city is radiant with light. Compared to the other mountains, which are rich with game, it's more majestic.

[ 4 : 47 ] That's why it's the object of attack by others. There are riches to be plundered in Jerusalem. But what we see is that instead of the hunted, it's the hunters or the valiant who are plundered.

The tables are turned because they've come upon the dwelling place of God. The words last sleep, it's just a nice way of talking about their death.

They're powerless to lift their hands as they come upon Jerusalem. By contrast, the God of Jacob is so powerful that he doesn't even need to lift his hand.

No need to send out an army almost. Instead, as we read, at your rebuke, at your mere rebuke, both horse and chariot lie still.

Now we know, don't we, how power and authority gives one the ability to bring peace. So as a parent, I'm well aware of this power.

[ 5 : 51 ] I use it to maintain peace and order in my home. Alyssa and I make the rules. Where children misbehave, and it doesn't happen often in our house, but when they do, fighting with each other, parents have the ability to enforce the peace by sending everyone to their rooms.

It doesn't happen now. It doesn't work nowadays. But when they were younger. Or taking away their privileges. Or withholding their favorite desserts. Those are always very effective.

The same goes for our society, doesn't it? The police, the law enforcers, have the power to maintain peace and order on our streets. And most of the time, they don't even need to use it.

Merely knowing they have the power makes us comply. I was one stop, I was driving, and was stopped by a policeman in a bicycle, on a bicycle.

You know, I could have sped away, right? But no, I knew he had the power, and so I stopped. I know he could read my plates as well, so that's probably the other reason. But anyway, you get the point.

[ 7 : 03 ] In the same way, during the times of the Romans, even though their rule was brutal, there was peace. The 200 or so years during Jesus' time was called the Pax Romana, the Roman peace.

Because at that time, Rome was at the height of its power, and as a result, there was peace across the empire. But it's one thing to have power to secure peace.

It's another to do it with justice and equity. And thus, the Pax Romana may have been a time of peace, but because they were often unjust, people under their rule resented it.

There were uprisings from time to time. So it wasn't so much as true peace as perhaps just a succession of war. The Romans ruled with an iron fist, and there was no love lost for them.

And we see that today with many countries, or some countries, don't we? They appear to be peaceful and orderly on the surface, but given the freedoms denied of its citizens, you wonder whether there's true peace.

[ 8 : 09 ] But that is in the case, is it, with the God of Jacob? For as the psalmist now goes on to show, God's judgment and rule is fair and just. And so in verse 7, we read, It is you alone who are to be feared.

Who can stand before you when you are angry? From heaven you pronounce judgment, and the land feared and was quiet. When you, God, rose up to judge, to save all the afflicted of the land.

So yes, there is fear of the Lord, but this is a proper kind of fear. God isn't just angry because he's in a bad mood. Rather, he's angry at the injustice done to the afflicted of the land.

And so his judgment is against the rulers and kings of the land that have done this. Thus the fear it engenders is a proper fear of his righteous judgment. You see, God has been long suffering until now, but now he is rising up to act, to judge, to save, and he pronounces his judgment from his throne in heaven.

And as a consequence, everyone sees and no one is able to stand because they know that they are in the wrong.

[ 9 : 22 ] There is a universal knowledge or acknowledgement of their guilt. You know, when things go wrong, often, whether it's in a, you know, kind of community or in society, there's a lot of clamoring, isn't it?

A lot of finger pointing. People trying to blame one another. There will be arguments and then counter-arguments. And then, perhaps a person who is in authority, maybe it's a teacher in the classroom or a judge at the royal commission or something, they pronounce the judgment.

They put the facts and the evidence on the table, and then, all of a sudden, everyone realizes they're all at fault in some way or the other.

Now, when that happens, what occurs next? There is silence, isn't there? Everyone's a bit sheepish, you know, they'll be looking down at their toes, not able to look the judge or the teacher in the eye.

Well, that's the same thing that happens when God finally pronounces his judgment. All of us, we wish we could crawl under a rock to hide. And at this point, no one dares to keep arguing.

[ 10 : 34 ] But at the same time, there is also salvation, finally, for those who have been afflicted, who have been mistreated.

They find peace at God's coming. And in God's presence, God has the power to protect them, to bring all the evil to account.

And this is a different kind of peace, isn't it, to the one which is like the Pax Romana, which only uses force and power to attain it. Now, the one with the power to enforce the peace doesn't simply do it by sheer force of will.

God is not saying you must stop fighting because I say so. Rather, this peace is achieved by God revealing the truth about everyone.

The one who enforces peace is himself fair and just. and so no one can complain when they are unfairly treated. The result then is what occurs in verse 10.

[ 11 : 40 ] It says in the NIV, Surely your wrath against mankind brings you praise, and the survivors of your wrath are restrained. Now, the translation here is actually not quite that straightforward because if you look at a few others, so let's look at the next slide which is the English Standard Version.

it says, Surely the wrath of man, not wrath against humanity, shall praise you. The remnant of wrath you will put on like a belt. You go to the Christian Standard Bible, another version, and it says, Even human wrath will praise you.

You will clothe yourself with the wrath that remains. Now, they all sort of say slightly different things, but I think whatever you make of it, what is clear is that wherever it's coming from, there is praise for God as the end result.

The sense is that even those who oppose God or those who remain after God has judged will end up praising Him. Some may be willing, some may be grudging, but everyone will end up praising God.

And that's because God's justice is so clearly right. you can't help but agree, even if the judgment was against you, you can't help but praise God and agree that He is right.

[ 13 : 04 ] Now, as for the phrase survivors of wrath being restrained or putting on the remnant of wrath like a belt or clothing yourself with the wrath that remains, that's even a bit more cryptic.

But the best I could do with that is the idea that even after God's judgment has passed or He's already pronounced His judgment and the punishment has been meted out, what remains still reminds us of God's justice.

God, as it were, is like adorning Himself with a royal garment to remind everyone of it. A bit like a feather in someone's cap is how they used to mark the victory of a soldier or something after they've defeated an enemy.

but everyone witnesses God's justice and reputation and what ends up occurring is not just God's people, not just Israel that recognizes His righteous rule, but everyone, all the nations of the earth end up acknowledging that God is just.

And so we have then in the final verse, verse 12, all the kings of the earth will fear Him. the spirit of rulers, the proud spirit of rulers will be broken and this will occur whether they're willing or not.

[ 14 : 29 ] This is a vision of what will happen. Every mouth will give God praise. Every knee will bow down to God in fear and reverence.

That is going to happen. This is the universal truth that God wants us to see in this psalm. Now at the time that the psalm was written, it was to give comfort to God's people. That even though Israel was small compared to the other nations, that even though there were rulers around them that they would define against God and committing injustice against the poor and weak, even though some of them mocked those who worship God and perhaps even the kings within Israel were doing that, the reality is that God stands as judge in heaven.

So that at the end of the day, when the question in verse 7 is asked, who can stand before you when you are angry? Everyone. Every king, young or old, rich or poor, powerful or weak, everyone in all the earth stands silent.

And so even today, when this question is asked, I wonder, is anyone here today brave enough to make a stand and put your hand up and say, I think I'll have a go and see if I can stand before God when he's angry?

Anyone? No takers? We can't, can we? Because we all know that our own record is blemish, isn't it?

[ 16 : 06 ] We're all at fault. But thankfully, the psalmist didn't know it then, but we do as Christians, we know that we don't have to stand before God on our own, do we?

Because as Christians, we know that Jesus has done it for us. We stand on Jesus' record. And so in our New Testament reading today, in Ephesians chapter 2, we read that Christ himself is our peace.

He's not only broken down the wall between Jews and Gentiles, but as verse 16 says on the slide, he reconciled all of us to God through the cross. And as a result, verse 21, in Christ, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit. And so you see, God's dwelling is no longer physically in Zion.

His tent is not in Salem, but God dwells now by his spirit among his people, us, those of us who are redeemed in Christ.

[ 17 : 17 ] And so God's people, his church, we are his place of refuge. It's his dwelling place of peace. He dwells among us because of Jesus.

And even as the world around us is in turmoil, and at times our own lives and relationships are as well, and we yearn for that peace and quiet, we can find it in Christ.

And for those of us who have put our faith in Jesus, then please know this, that no matter how you may be feeling about your own lives, about the situation in the world, we have peace.

It's not that we will have peace, we already have peace because of Jesus. And we have it because God's wrath has been poured out, not on us, but on his Son.

We are able to stand before his anger because of what Jesus has already done. Now as Anglicans, we often practice the greeting of peace, and I think Steph read my sermon and inserted it, or maybe anticipated my sermon and we're going to have the greeting of peace in a while.

[ 18 : 29 ] But for many of us, we do it so habitually that we don't think much of it, do we? But actually, it symbolizes something of great significance, isn't it? When we gather, some of us will know, what do we say when we do it?

The peace of the Lord be always with you. That's what we say, don't we? And we say it without thinking, but if you think about it, what we're saying is the peace of the Lord is always with you.

And then of course we go around shaking hands with one another, and that's not just to be friendly or welcoming, but actually it's to indicate something more important, that the peace we have with God is the peace that we're able to offer each other.

It shows that as a result of peace with God, we ought to be at peace with one another. And that's another reality we mustn't forget, that no matter what else is going on in our lives, in Christ we have an everlasting peace with God that should encourage us then to be forgiving to one another.

But it also comforts us to know, as it says in both verse 10 and 12, that at the end of the day, every worldly ruler will fall silent in God's judgment.

[ 19 : 50 ] They will submit to the one who is to be feared. We simply have to wait patiently for it. But sandwiched in between verse 10 and 12 is our instruction for tonight.

And that is we're urged to respond rightly, to submit to God and his son willingly and joyfully rather than be forced to do so. And so verse 11 says, make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them.

And now I think this is an instruction to those who are already God's people and then the exhortation is to those outside Israel, outside the kingdom as it were. Let all the neighboring lands bring gifts to the one to be feared.

But in both cases, these responses are to be done willingly in worship to God through Jesus Christ. As Steph was asking earlier, I'm sure some of you were riveted to your TVs last night for the coronation of King Charles III.

I keep thinking King Charles Cavaliers, but anyway. I don't know, how many people stayed through, watched through the whole six hours or whatever. Oh, bandit, very good. And Chris, well done.

[ 21 : 03 ] I was a bit too busy, so I was just ducking in and out and as the listener was saying, hey, come see this, I came and saw that. But there was one point in the ceremony, wasn't it, that the king's subject had to make vows, didn't they, to the king.

Prince William had to come and kneel before and say, I don't know what is it, I pledge my whatever life and limb or something, liege, I'm your loyal liege or something. Very old English, didn't get that.

But all of them had to make oaths of allegiance to be loyal to King Charles, didn't they? I mean, I think even Anthony Albanese had to do it, even though he's a Republican, he says, and he's probably doing it very grudgingly.

But that's the context, that's the sort of the same situation that we have here in verse 11, isn't it? And it's the same in marriage, when we make vows as we get married, then we do it willingly and joyfully, after which we spend the rest of our lives living it out, fulfilling it, committing to love and serve our spouse.

And as Christians, if you've been baptized, then you've also made vows and promises to God, haven't you? To serve and follow Jesus all your lives.

[ 22 : 19 ] And so this is what verse 11 is about. making vows and then spending the rest of our lives fulfilling the promises that we've made to God. Having, of course, realized what Jesus has done for us by saving us.

But this call is not just for all who have decided to serve God, is it? Because then the psalmist extends it to the neighboring lands, to those who are not yet committed, as if to say, come, join us, pledge your loyalty to Jesus also, bring gifts to the one to be feared.

Do it today, because everyone will have to do it one day. So do it now before it's too late. Because on the day when God pronounces the final judgment, you either have to answer for yourself and take your chance as to whether you want to stand or not, or else you stand on the record of Jesus.

If you come now to Jesus, then you will be safe. You will find that dwelling of peace with God. There will be no fear of judgment, just a proper fear of who God is.

There are two images of God in this psalm that is true, isn't it? On the one hand, we have in verse 8, God who pronounces his judgment. And have a look at where he is when he does that.

[ 23 : 43 ] He is in heaven. Judgment is over all the land against everyone, including the rulers in the world. When he pronounces his judgment, there is nowhere to hide.

Everyone will be silent before God at the time. But then, there is also a second location by which we can find God.

And that is in verse 2, isn't it? God also dwells in Zion. His tent is in Salem. And there, God in his kindness and love chose to come down to his people, to be among them.

He sends his son to live among us, to be one of us, to die for our sins. It's a picture of God in his grace and accommodation coming to us, to love and to be with us.

And as a result, God's dwelling place is an oasis of peace. It's a place of refuge where the weapons of war are broken. And there, the afflicted can come to be saved.

[ 24 : 51 ] And that is the place where God now welcomes all of us, the place of peace that is found in Christ Jesus. Even as the world around us continues in turmoil and strife, this is the place where we can wait patiently by faith and in hope, find comfort, be encouraged, and wait until Jesus comes again.

So I hope that you come, come to God's place, to his dwelling place, find peace in him through Christ Jesus. Let's pray. Father, we worship your power and majesty and we praise you for your justice.

We know that we cannot stand before you in your righteous and holy judgment and yet in Christ we have peace. Thank you for this blessing.

Help us to keep the vows of obedience and allegiance that we have made towards you. May we serve you all our days and bring others to offer their gifts of tribute and worship to you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.