

“He is our peace”

Sermon for 13 December 2015

Texts: John 14:27-31; Ephesians 2:14; Romans 5:1-2

Tuesday. December 8 at 7:30-800 am. Charles Stanley is preaching on peace and anxiety. I tune in. Why not? I’ve been having a little anxiety about my sermon on peace. A man would be a fool not to take good help when it’s offered. So I am beginning with a synopsis of that message. If you want to keep your peace, you need to do three things that form the acronym IKE (Dr. Stanley’s order was KIE—but IKE is catchier): Increase your trust, keep your focus and enlarge your affection . . . that’s right, you will keep your peace if you increase your trust in the Lord as you keep your focus on His word and enlarge the affection in your heart for God. Okay, got it? I like IKE—don’t you?

If you have followed Dr. Stanley, however, you know that his messages are laced with relevant scriptures and the interjection, “now listen.” The first scripture he expounded was John 14:27-31:

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. 28 You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29 And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. 30 I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, 31 but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

Very helpfully, this passage informs us that the “best” peace is not any form of worldly peace (of which there are bushels and bushels) but *His peace*. To be really clear about worldly strategies for peace: I have in view things like one world government, climate control, sociological interventions, indoctrination and re-education—or sex, drugs and rock and roll! Jesus is, first of all, our peace, just as Ephesians 2:14 affirms: **He is our peace**. He loved us, made us alive (from the dead) reconciled us to God and tore down the dividing wall of hostility between God and man, and man and man. He leaves this peace with us by virtue of His indwelling presence in the heart of the genuine believer which, even though Jesus is also present to the Father in heaven, is a real and enduring presence in our hearts. I am not summarizing Dr. Stanley here, but expositing John 14 itself.

In this passage, we also have peace because of Jesus' forewarnings and promises. For the first, He tells what is going to happen ahead of time (it does) and we should not be dismayed because of the fearful things that would soon happen to Him (trial, abuse, crucifixion and death). Jesus wants current events to build our faith; not demolish it. God knows all about Paris, about San Bernardino and all about ISIS and while He is saddened by the evil He is not surprised—nor taken off guard. While our President may need a new plan for dealing with terrorism, God does not need to revise His plan—only implement it. Secondly, John 14, moves beyond warnings to promises: **I am going away, and I will come to you.** (v. 28) Then Jesus says something that sounds like “If you were thinking about Me instead of yourselves, **you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father.** (v. 28) Jesus concludes the discourse of John 14 with **I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, 31 but I do as the Father has commanded me.** (vv. 30-31) This touches on the plan of God which I just alluded to! The ruler of this world is not in charge—he **has no claim on Me** rather **I do as the Father has commanded me.** God has a plan and I am sticking to it. How reassuring, how peace inducing it is to know “things are on track,” headed in the right direction, “just where they should be.”

Having alluded to Ephesians 2:14, let's go there. It will reveal the basic contours of God's plan! The first thirteen verses of Ephesians 2 deal with our vertical relationship with God: **you were dead in trespasses and sins . . . following the course of this world** sold out as it is to the devil and numbered among the sons of disobedience (we were fleshly, driven by desires) and **were by nature children of wrath** (v.3) *like everyone else in the entire world!* We were not sick, not sin handicapped; we were altogether dead and requiring resurrection. It doesn't get anymore vertical than that: we were flat-lined on earth and, apart from an intervention from heaven, we were never getting up. Resurrection is the need. All lost sinners are as dead men, and the only distinction between one unsaved sinner and the next lies in the stage, or degree of decay. How far towards human humus, organic soil, dirt as compost, have they progressed?

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that incoming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. And this was not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that none may boast. . . . remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.(vv. 4-9, 12)

The Ephesians were not Jews, they had neither the Word, the temple cult, nor the national identity/experience of their Jewish counterparts.

But now in Christ Jesus (that is, by faith in Him) **you** (the Gentiles) **who were once far off have been brought near by the atoning blood of Christ.** (v.13) A seismic shift has occurred, the land mass plates of world history have shifted and, as it were, collided; forming one new land mass in place of the former two. In the sacrifice of Jesus, as the Lamb, the priestly destiny of Israel has been both inaugurated and fulfilled. I want to point out that: actually this was the promise of God to Moses at the time of the Exodus; see Exodus 19: 5' **Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' This is an elaboration of the earlier promise of God, found embedded in the call of Abram (before he came to be known as Abraham) as written in Genesis 12:1ff: **Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you (through you and your "seed") all the families of the earth will be blessed."** They will find their way by the godly, sacrificial ministry of My servants people through their warfare and global turmoil to peace.

Both of these trajectories had, by the time of Jesus, gone terribly wrong and the promises of God to Abraham and to Moses, which had a worldwide scope, or universal intention, were sadly misappropriated and perverted into spiritual elitism as well as religious exclusivism. In a plague of self-serving, privilege-hogging, the Hebrews turned Israelites turned Jews took what God desired as a blessing for all and hijacked as special treatment for their ethnic group! That put up walls between themselves and everyone else—*which exist even to this day*. This caused division, enmity and strife on the horizontal plane. And what made it exceedingly worse was that those who were strangers to God were essentially lost. They needed the God of Israel to be their God, too; but instead worshipped demons, set up idols and, if the truth be told, invented such religious attractions (child sacrifice, bloodlettings, and debauched fertility cults lubricated with new wine—many of which "religions" were keyed to the agrarian cycle, the death and resurrection myths rooted in the seasonal round) that even those who knew God wanted to join in! *Hardly what God had in mind after the flood, when the Lord pushed a restart button with the righteous Noah and hoped for better, voluntary results.* We, as a race, may have set out from the same altar at some point in time, but we managed to get lost in very disparate ways over time! By this I mean to stress that the

departure from true worship was conscious, rooted in rebellion and embraced sin and death openly. And the mess was so immense that it took the death of our Savior to cash it out! To redeem us from our lostness and folly. But, according to the promise of God in Zechariah 13 & 14, what we took thousands of years to get into, He would resolve **in a single day!** He has come and done so.

It is in the face of to this whole unholy mess that Paul declares **He is our peace.** He is our only hope for peace in the middle east, in the streets of Chicago or the suburbs of Los Angeles. And **He is our peace** in every place, through the atoning blood of His sacrifice *because it is only after He has brought reconciliation of the lost about with God that reconciliation with our fellowman becomes possible.* This not only goes far beyond tolerance, it demolishes the whole notion that tolerance can have any beneficial effects apart from saving faith. Remember what we need is resurrection, not resuscitation . . . total transformation into one new man, and not the acquisition of a few new accessories, or superficial make-over. Christ reconciles believers, believers are the only human beings capable of living at peace with God and one another. The church is, as it were, the proving ground of this new reality. Hatred has got to go, the love of God to us and through us dispels that hatred.

It is the lusts of our flesh and our proclivity to sin that causes conflict, wars and ruin. Where true Christianity prevails, wars decrease . . . the quality and span of human life increases! “Once you become a Christian, you cannot hate anybody. To be angry without a cause is a sin to you as soon as you become a believer in Christ!” (C H Spurgeon) And not only that peace with God, but peace between brothers is soon joined by peace with oneself: “for a man is at war with himself as he is with God until Christ comes in, he enjoys no rest.” **There is no peace for the wicked.** Whoever has by faith obtained Christ has taken possession of the peace which passes all understanding. This is because He, Christ, is Himself our peace! He doesn't make it, He doesn't bring it; He is it! “Nothing in you, nothing you can do, nothing you can feel, but Christ, to whom you must look or perish. He must be your peace.” (CHS) Peace is possible among us because it is His Peace and He gives it to us. Let us then with gladness receive, and receiving let us also give it away.

Amen.