

INTRODUCTION

I heard a funny story about a fancy NYC Lawyer who was out in West Texas on a dove shoot. He shot a dove and it fell in a rancher's pasture. As the lawyer started to climb over the fence the rancher walked up and said, "You can't go in my field, that's trespassing." The NYC lawyer said, "I'm a lawyer and that dove is my property. If you don't let me get my dove, I will sue you for everything you've got."

The rancher said, "There's no need for that. Down here we settle things by the Texas three-kick rule." The lawyer said, "what's that?" The rancher said, "It's easy. I kick you three times and then you kick me three times. Then we keep trading kicks until someone gives up."

The lawyer thought, "I'm younger and stronger than this old hayseed." So he said, "Okay, I guess I'll try that."

So the rancher kicked the lawyer in the shin with his sharp-toed cowboy boot, and then when he grabbed his leg, the rancher kicked him in the stomach knocking the breath out of him. Then before he could recover the rancher kicked his other leg out from under him and the lawyer fell in a heap. After a few moments, the lawyer stood to his feet and dusted himself off. He said, "And now old man, I'll show you how we kick in NYC." The rancher smiled and said, "There's no need. I give up, go get your dove." And he walked off.

After two months of staying at home, there may be some of you who want to give up—or others of you who want to kick someone!

But don't give up and don't start kicking. God is going to bring us through this.

We've been in the Gospel According to John for two years. I started in May of 2018. But I came up with the plan to teach verse by verse through John during my annual planning retreat way back in the summer of 2017. That's almost three years ago. God knew that in May 2020 we would be in the middle of a global pandemic, so I think it is no accident that He timed it so we come to the passage today that contains perhaps the strongest promise of peace in the Bible.

The setting is the upper room after the Last Supper. As Michael mentioned last week, the disciples were afraid and unsettled because Jesus had told them He was going away, and they couldn't follow Him. Their hearts were confused and troubled. Just like many people are confused and troubled today. It was in that setting in which Jesus uttered these powerful words:

John 14:27-31. "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful.

You have heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens so that when it does happen you may believe. I will

not talk with you much longer, because the ruler of the world is coming*. He has no power over me. On the contrary, so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do as the Father commanded me. "Get up; let's leave this place.

* The ruler of this world is Satan and John 13:27 the Bible says that Satan had entered Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew He was on the way to a place where Judas would betray Him and He would be arrested.

So Jesus and the disciples left the Upper Room and started the half-mile walk to the Garden of Gethsemane. They leave the upper city and walk down some steps that many of us have stood on that pass south of the Temple Mount. By now it's dark, and they passed through several vineyards on the steep hillside. As they pass them, I can easily imagine Jesus stopped in one of the vineyards and saying, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he removes." Next week we'll be in John 15 and I'll talk about "Our Vine Line to God."

But today, I want to grab hold of the Promise of Peace that Jesus is offering and I want you to allow His peace to replace your fear and frustration. Jesus said that this peace is HIS Peace – it's not the peace the world offers. What's the difference? The world says, "Peace is the absence of conflict." But Jesus says, "Peace is God's gift of serenity in the midst of problems."

The world doesn't understand peace. People talk about world peace, and that's a noble goal. It's always a good answer in a beauty contest. But according to an article in The New York Times, out of almost 4,000 years of recorded human history, there have only been about 200 years of peace—and those years of peace are just pauses for the armies to reload.

Is it possible to have true inner peace? I found a quote where a woman wrote: "My therapist told me the way to achieve true inner peace is to finish what I start. So far today, I have finished 2 bags of chips and a chocolate cake. I feel better already."

The world would say you'll have peace only when we have completely passed through this crisis. But nobody knows how long Covid-19 will be around. But the good news is that you can have the peace Jesus offers NOW—God's gift of serenity in the midst of this crisis. So let me share with you three ways you can claim this powerful promise of peace that Jesus gives us.

1. KNOW THAT GOD IS THERE: He sees what you're facing.

God knows what each of us are facing today. He promised to be with us. Psalm 139 tells us that God knows everything about us. He knows when we sit down and when we stand up. He knows our thoughts from afar. Before we speak a word, He knows what it is. So if you are needing peace, He knows it and He is offering it to you.

Corrie ten Boom survived a Nazi Concentration Camp. She once wrote: "There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still."

So when you find yourself anxious or fearful remember these words written by Paul when he was chained in a dungeon. "Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7 CSB)

So when you find yourself anxious, pray and claim God's serenity. There's actually a famous prayer written by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. It's called "The Serenity Prayer" that many 12-step programs use. The classic form that you often read says: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; The courage to change the things I can, And the wisdom to know the difference." That's a great prayer. We should be praying that every day. But someone created a parody called "The Senility Prayer" which says: "God, grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, the good fortune to run into the ones I do, And the eyesight to know the difference!"

God's eyesight is perfect. He sees what you're facing. None of us foresaw the Covid-19 crisis. But it didn't surprise God. I've said before that one thing that God has never said is, "Uh oh."

So when you're in pain, searching for peace, the first thing to know is that God is there and He sees what you're facing. Right now, I'm thinking of a great word for God that we don't use much anymore. It is a word that so describes God's character that our Founding Fathers often used this word for God in our founding documents. They just capitalized it and substituted it for God. Give up yet? Here's a hint. It's such a powerful word that the Baptist preacher, Roger Williams, used it to name a city that is now the capital of our smallest state. It's the word Providence. In our Declaration of Independence they called it Divine Providence. *Pro* means "ahead." *Videre* means, "to see." We get our word "video" from it. When used as a title of God, it means that God not only sees what's happening to us NOW, He sees what's ahead. No matter what you're going through right now, God has already seen the video of what's going to happen. And trust me, it's GOOD.

2. KNOW THAT GOD IS AWARE: He knows what you're fearing.

I've seen studies that show stress levels have increased during Covid-19. There is a rise in suicides. There was an article in the Tyler Paper this week about how people are having trouble sleeping during this pandemic.

Even before the pandemic, insomnia was a huge problem. Do you have trouble sleeping at night? Over 70 million Americans suffer from some form of insomnia. Women are more likely as men to struggle with sleep deficit than men. I heard one lady explain it this way. She said, "That's because there's not much going on in men's brains to start with."

I saw a picture that showed how different men and women's brains are. A woman's brain is a conglomeration of interconnected circuits that are always firing. A man's brain is like boxes. There's a work box, a family box, a hobby box. And there really is a box that's empty. That's why a wife will sometimes ask her husband, "What are you thinking?" And he'll say, "Nothing."

She'll say, "It's impossible to be thinking nothing!" But ladies, yep, there's that empty box. Sorry.

People are reporting that over the past two months they've had strange dreams. I agree. I had a dream the other night that I was preaching and I looked out and the room was empty. Hmm. Dreams do come true. Then a few nights later I had a dream that I was preaching and this room was packed. That dream will come true again, too!

Someone said the human brain is an amazing instrument. It starts working the moment you're born and doesn't stop until you stand up in front of a crowd to speak! Actually, your brain never stops. And that's one of the reasons why people have trouble sleeping at night. Their brain just keeps on working, bringing up what happened, or what might happen tomorrow. Even when you go to sleep your brain keeps working—that's why we dream. Wouldn't it be great if our brains had an on/off switch? At night you could just get into bed and switch it off and set it to come back on the next morning? Unfortunately, you can't switch off your brain, but you can change the channel!

Try doing what I do sometimes. I change to channel 4 and channel 26. That's Psalms 4 and Isaiah 26. Here are a couple of my favorite scriptures to quote at night. "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, Lord, make me live in safety." (Psalm 4:8 CSB) "You will keep the mind that is dependent on you in perfect peace, for it is trusting in you. Trust in the Lord forever, because in the Lord, the Lord himself, is an everlasting rock!" (Isaiah 26:3-4 CSB) So try channels 4 and 26.

Years ago a widow wrote me that she had trouble sleeping after her husband died. Then she memorized the 23rd Psalm and would recite it before going to bed. She would emphasize the personal pronouns. She would quote out loud, "The Lord is MY Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes ME to lie down in green pastures. He leads ME beside still waters." She said she often would fall asleep before getting to the end which says, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow ME all the days of MY life and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever." Try it.

God is there. God is aware. And finally..

3. KNOW THAT GOD CARES: He knows how you're feeling.

The writer of Hebrews says Jesus, our High Priest, knows our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way we are tempted, yet He never sinned. Worry is a sin, and we know Jesus was tempted to worry. Fear is a sin, and we know Jesus was tempted to be afraid. You should know Jesus knows EXACTLY how you're feeling when you are afraid. He shares the feelings of our weaknesses. And more importantly, in our weakest times, God cares.

Once Jesus and the disciples were in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. They panicked and this is what they asked Jesus. They cried out, "Don't you care if we drown?" (Mark 4:38 NIV) That's a good question. If you're honest, you might admit you've wanted to ask God the same thing.

"God, I'm hurting, don't you care?" "God, I've lost my job, don't you care?" "God, I've got cancer, don't you care?" "God, I'm all alone, don't you care?"

He DOES care. Sometimes Jesus calms the storms of life, but most often He calms our hearts in the midst of life's storms. We all know that a hurricane is a devastating force of nature. But at the center of every hurricane there's an eye, where it's calm and peaceful. The sun is shining, the air is still, and even birds fly around in the eye of the storm. And when you know that God cares for you, you can be in the peaceful eye of the storm while all around you the storm rages.

How much does God care for you? Listen to His words. "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." (Isaiah 49:15-16 NIV).

The great British pastor Charles Spurgeon pointed this out: "God says, 'I have engraved YOU.' He didn't say, 'your name.' The name is there, but that is not all. God says, 'I have engraved your person, your image, your circumstances, your sins, your temptations, your weaknesses, your wants, your works, everything about you, all that concerns you; I have put all of this together here.' Will you ever say again that your God has forsaken you when He has engraved you on His own palms?"

We've all known people who take a pen and write something on their hand when they wanted to remember it. A pastor told me about a wedding he performed where the bride and groom had written their own vows, and they were going to recite them from memory. The groom was afraid he would forget the vow, so he wrote his vow on the palm of his hand. The only trouble is that grooms are usually nervous and they sweat a lot. (I never say, "Wilt thou" to the groom because he's usually already wilted!) In this wedding when it came time to read his vows he opened his hand and there was just a blue blob of smeared ink. He was so flustered that when he and the bride saw it he just blurted out, "All I can say is 'I love you!'" That was enough.

Remember the setting of John 14. This is the last night before the crucifixion. Jesus is going to continue to teach the Disciples as they walk toward the Garden of Gethsemane. But do you want to know the very last thing He said to them before He started praying in John 17? It was all about the promise of peace.

Jesus said, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." (John 16:33 CSB) The two key words in the verse are "in me." When you are in Jesus and Jesus, the Prince of Peace is in you, you will experience a supernatural peace that passes all human understanding.

CONCLUSION

Life is a series of battles. Right now we are battling the effects of an invisible enemy called Covid-19. And we're battling all the side-effects of it. There are emotional, spiritual, and economic side-effects. But as followers of Jesus, we must remember that we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

As we face this overwhelming enemy, I was reminded of a great story of a strange battle in the Old Testament. It's in 2 Chronicles 20 and it happened when Jehoshaphat was the King of Judah. In the late 90's our children's choirs performed a musical about this story, called Fat Fat Jehoshaphat.

Here's the story. There were three massive armies that were mobilized to attack King Jehoshaphat's army. He was greatly outnumbered. So he cried out to God and said, "God we are powerless against this great enemy. We don't know what to do, but we look to you."

God said, "I'll fight the battle for you. Here's what I want you to do. Head out to battle, but instead of putting your mightiest soldiers on the front lines, I want you to put your praise team out front. And when they start praising me, I'll give you the victory."

If I had been Jehoshaphat I would have said, "Lord, isn't that backwards? Why don't you give us the victory first, and THEN we'll praise You." God said, "Nope, do it my way. Praise first, then you'll have victory."

So Jehoshaphat agreed. He put his best singers on the front lines and they marched into battle singing, "Give thanks to the Lord for His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord for His love endures forever."

I imagine the enemy armies expected that the fiercest warriors would be on the front lines: They weren't expecting the choir. They were probably laughing and mocking the singing soldiers.

But then a strange thing happened. Those three enemy armies started attacking each other. The army of Judah continued to march forward, "Give thanks to the Lord for His love endures forever." And by the time the army of Judah arrived, the enemy had been destroyed. They expected warfare and what they found was PEACE.

There's a couple of great lessons for us. As we face this invisible army of Covid-19 you may feel overwhelmed, but we need to pray what Jehoshaphat prayed in 2 Chronicles 20:12 CSB "WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO; BUT WE LOOK TO YOU." That prayer even rhymes in English. And it's a great prayer for us to be praying, "Lord, we don't know what to do. But our eyes are on You."

The other lesson is that it will be easy for us to Praise God when we have passed through the worst of this battle. But I want to challenge you to be on the front lines with praise and worship. Don't wait until we're through this crisis. Get on the front lines starting today and proclaim, 'Give thanks to the Lord for His Love endures forever. Give Thanks to the Lord for His Love endures forever! And you'll find God's PEACE instead of a battle.

It's one thing to have the peace of God – that's God's gift to His children. But if you don't know the Lord, what you need first is peace WITH God. You see, our sins have separated us from God. But Jesus came to die on the cross so we could be reconciled with our creator.

Do you have this peace WITH God? Only Jesus can give you peace with God. The Bible says in Romans 5:1, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

God loves you and He wants to forgive your sin. He wants to make peace with you through the death of Jesus on the cross. Only then can you experience the peace OF God – tranquility in the midst of troubles.

Many of you listening know what it is to have peace WITH God – you've invited Jesus to come into your life. But if you are watching me and you don't have the absolute assurance that when you die you will go to Heaven, then you can do something about it today. I'd like to lead you in a simple prayer that expresses faith. You can have peace WITH God and you can have the peace OF God. Jesus promised.

Would you repeat this prayer with me that you see on the screen?

God, I'm a sinner and I'm sorry.

Please forgive me. I want to have Your peace.

I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son

and I want to trust Him as my Savior.

I'm willing to follow Him as my Lord

from this moment forward and forever.

In Jesus name, AMEN

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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