

Sunday 22nd November 2020

Glynde Lutheran Church

Sermon on Ephesians 6:23

Theme: “Peace and love with faith”

**“May God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ give to you
all peace and love with faith”**

Introduction:

“May God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give to...*you all* peace and love with faith”. This is the blessing that Paul gives at the end of his letter to the Christians in Ephesus. It’s the last Sunday of the church year today, so I think that it’s appropriate to have this as our Bible verse for today.

I’ve always liked this blessing, *this prayer*. In fact, I like it so much that I’ve used it in the past regularly at the end of most burial services that I’ve taken at gravesides, *and in more recent times at the end of most funeral services*.

I’ve used it because it represents my most basic prayer for all people, regardless of where ‘they are at’, *regardless of whether they are Christians or not*: that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ may give them peace and love with faith.

And this is my prayer for you all today: that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ may give *you* peace and love with faith....

Part 1: “...with faith”

It might seem a strange prayer to pray for you here today, because surely *faith* is a least something that I should be able to assume in most of you here today, *all of you here today*: faith in God as your loving Father, and in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

But faith isn’t necessarily something that remains constant. It can lessen, *and even fade away*, as it is buffeted by the many winds and gales of life: by suffering, by times of intellectual assault by those who say that they have different answers to life’s questions, by pressures to get more of this world’s goods for yourself, and so on. That’s why I focus on these areas a

lot in my preaching and my teaching to you: because I want you to grow in your faith, and not have your faith lessened in any way as you are buffeted by the winds and gales of life.

My prayer for us, *as brothers and sisters in God's family*, is that we will be people of faith. For I believe that faith in God as our loving Father and in Jesus as our Saviour and your Lord is vitally important: for this life, and also so far as the world to come is concerned.

In fact, verse after verse in the Bible stresses that faith in Jesus as our Saviour determine whether or not we are God's forgiven child or not. Listen to some of the passage where the writers of the books and letters of the New Testament, *following Jesus*, stress that we are saved, *that we are put right with God, that we are forgiven*, through faith in Jesus as our Saviour:

* **Luke**

“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your family” (*Paul and Silas to the jailer at Philippi in Acts 16:31*).

* **John**

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost but have eternal life (*John 3:16*).

* **Paul**

“God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ (*Rom. 3:22*).

* **For we conclude that a person is put right with God only through faith, and not by doing what the Law commands”** (*Rom. 3:28*)

“For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith” (*Eph. 2:8*).

The phrase “through faith” is shorthand for “through faith in Jesus as our Saviour”.

These passages are just the tip of the iceberg in Scripture: everywhere you look, the writers of the books and letters of the New Testament emphasis *in echo of Jesus* that we are saved by our faith in Jesus as our Saviour.

And faith is more than just believing that Jesus died on the cross “for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3).

Faith is trusting in Jesus, trusting that he suffered and died “for me”.

Being a Christian, having faith in Jesus as your Saviour, is much more than simply confessing the right formulae. It is much more than knowing intellectually that Jesus is your Saviour, and that he suffered and died on the cross for you. Even Satan knows that: that God’s Son, Jesus, suffered and died on the cross for the sins of human beings.

No, for faith to be genuine, it has to also involve trust. In fact, faith is essentially “trusting in someone or something”, and Christian faith is trusting in God as your dear Father and in Jesus as your Saviour. I like the illustration that Harry Wendt drew up about faith as part of his Divine Drama Bible study series. Faith in Jesus as our Saviour involves not just knowledge, or even knowledge and assent, but it also involves “trust”.

One story that I know that brings this out dramatically is the story of Blondin, the famous tight-rope walker of the 1930’s, and his challenge to the spectators who were watching him walk on a tight-rope across Niagara Falls in America. Apparently, after walking across the Niagara Falls on a tightrope, he turned to the spectators and made a sensational offer:

He would cross the falls again, this time with someone on his back. Who was willing to go? No one rushed forward to accept the offer. So, picking a man at random, Blondin asked him, “Do you believe that I am able to carry you across?”

“Yes, sir”, came the unhesitating reply.

“Well, then, let’s go”, Blondin answered.

“Not on your life!”, the man replied, and the man withdrew into the crowd.

And so it went on. One after another expressed...*belief* in the tightrope walker, but no one would agree to let Blondin take him across. Finally, a young fellow moved towards the front of the crowd. Blondin repeated his question: “Do you believe I can carry you across safely?”

“Yes, I do!”, the young man said.

“Are you willing to let me?”, asked Blondin.

“As a matter of fact, I am”, the young man said.

The young man climbed onto the expert's back. Blondin stepped onto the rope, paused momentarily, then moved across the falls without difficulty. There were many in that crowd who believed that Blondin could do it. But there was only one who was willing to trust him to do it (*Green, Illustrations, p. 137*).

So, there is a big difference between mere belief, and true faith which involves trusting in the person concerned. Likewise, faith in Jesus as one's Saviour is much more than merely nodding assent to this proposition. It is a trusting of one's future to Jesus. It is a grabbing hold of the life buoy which is Jesus, and hanging on for dear life. It is saying to Jesus:

"Thank you, Lord Jesus, for suffering and dying for us all on the cross. Let what you did there for us all, be for me".

Or it is praying to God:

Dear God, I've mucked up and messed up in life. Thank you that Jesus on the cross suffered my punishment and my judgement. Forgive me, Father, for Jesus' sake.

As long as we are clinging to Jesus as our Saviour, not matter how weak our faith is, we are saved. I take great consolation from the account in the Gospels of the woman who had been bleeding in an embarrassing way for twelve years. She "came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of his cloak", thinking to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will get well" (*Matt. 9:20-22*). She touched his cloak, and she was made better. And Jesus turned to her and said:

"Courage, my daughter! Your faith has made you well" (v. 22).

I love that story because it reminds me that no matter how weak my faith is, as long as I am reaching out to Jesus, *as long as I am clinging to Jesus as my Saviour*, I am forgiven.

But, of course, Jesus wants more than us just clinging to him: he wants us to hold his hand and to walk with him. Again and again in the Gospel, Jesus says to people: "Follow me! "Follow me! "Follow me! (*Matt. 4:19, 9:9; Mark 8:34, 10:21*). That's my prayer for each of us: that we will hold Jesus by the hand, and go with him where ever he wants us to go.

Part 2: “Peace...”

May God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give to you all...faith. And may you always have *the peace* that accompanies faith: peace of mind, so far as God is concerned. When we know that Jesus suffered and died for each of us, and when we trust in him as our Saviour, we have peace of mind because we know that God forgives us for Jesus' sake (*Rom 5:1; 8:1*). The relief that this brings to the burdened soul, to the inner self, is immense.

The sort of peace of mind and relief that comes to you when you know that God forgives you for Jesus' sake is very much like the relief that the German pastor Peter Brunner must have felt when he was released from a seemingly hopeless situation in the Dachau concentration camp. He writes:

I will never forget that June morning in 1935, when I was sitting in the barracks of the Dachau concentration camp, in what appeared to be a hopeless situation.

Then the camp commandant himself entered our cell. In his hand, he held a telegram. The words broke into the silence: “Brunner, Weber, pack your things. You are released”. These words changed our whole status at a stroke. A few hours later I was free, free as a bird, flying over the camp in an aeroplane, escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowls (*The Lutheran, 24th July, '89*).

Peter Bruner was free! And so are we when we trust in Jesus as our Saviour: we are free of guilt and fear of being punished by God for our “sins”. We are at peace with God, who we know forgives us for Jesus' sake. As Paul writes in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

“Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom. 5:1*).

And as God's forgiven children, we are in the care of our dear Father in heaven. We don't have to worry about our needs, because God, our Quartermaster, is looking after us. In another of his letters, Paul sums this up when he writes:

“Don't worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And God's peace, which transcends all human understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (*Phil 4:6-7*).

There is a lovely picture of the sort of peace we can have, as we rest in peace in the loving, forgiving arms of God our Father. It is found in story that I often use to describe the peace that we can have as God's beloved, forgiven children.

The story goes like this:

Apparently, there was once a king who offered a prize to the artist who could paint the best picture of peace. Many artists entered this competition and submitted various paintings depicting "peace". The King looked at all the pictures, but in the end there were only two that he really liked, and he set about deciding which of these two he would give his prize to.

The first painting was that of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for the peaceful towering mountains around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains as well. But these were rugged and bare. Above the mountains was an angry sky, from which rain fell, and in which lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall.

And under the waterfall, there was a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. And in the bush was a nest, containing a mother bird covering her chicks. There in the middle of rushing, angry water sat the mother birds and her chicks in perfect peace.

The King ended up choosing the second picture as the perfect depiction of peace. Why? "Because", the King said, "peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, or trouble, or strife. Peace means being in the midst of all these things, and still having calm in your heart. This is the real meaning of peace" (*Stories for the Heart*, p. 239).

That's the sort of peace that I pray you have, as you rest in God's loving, forgiving care.

Part 3: "...and love"

May God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give to you all peace *and love* with faith.... What sort of love is Paul speaking about in his prayer for the Christians in Ephesus, and what sort of love am I talking about? Well, the sort of love that God has for us, and that Jesus, God's Son, showed us in his life here on earth: a self-giving, serving love.

God doesn't want us to sit back on our backsides happy and content that we are His loved, forgiven children. No, He wants us to live as His children (*Eph. 4:32-5:2*). He wants us to be "active in love" (*Gal. 5:6*).

God wants us to be compassionate and caring for those around us, *just like Jesus, His Son was and is* (e.g. *Mark 1:40-42; Matt 20:29-34; John 13*).

I think that the best modern day story that I know with regard to the sort of love that God wants us to have for one another and other is the one about "chopsticks in heaven". Do you remember it? It goes like this:

A man had just arrived in Heaven and was met by Peter. He asked Peter to give him a glimpse of hell, so that he might appreciate Heaven all the more. This Peter did.

In hell, the man saw a long table extending as far as the eye could see. It was filled with the most delicious sorts of food. But everyone around the table was starving to death.

When the man asked Peter for an explanation, Peter said, "Every here is required to take food from the table only with four-foot long chopsticks. They are so long that no one can pick up the food and put it in his or her mouth. That's why everyone is dying of starvation".

When they returned to Heaven, the man was surprised to see that in Heaven there was an identical table with identical foods. However, everyone in Heaven was well fed.

The man said to Peter, "How do they feed themselves here in Heaven?" Peter replied, "With four-foot long chopsticks as in hell". "Well, then", the man said, "why are the people in hell starving to death, while all the people here in Heaven are well fed and happy?" To which Peter replied, "In Heaven, we feed each other!" (*No. 3203 of "7700 Illustrations"*).

Conclusion:

So my prayer for us all, *as we end a church year, and prepare to begin another*, is the same as Paul gives at the end of his letter in his blessing to his brothers and sisters in God's family in Ephesus:

“May God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give to...*you all* peace and love with faith”.