

Psalm 35:1-5, 7-10; Matthew 11:1-6  
 “A Fruitful Life of Peace”

Has life ever turned you upside down, turned you around, kicked you in the seat of the pants, and left you hanging with something you never expected? Something you never wanted?

Today we are reading a story about one of God’s obedient men who was faithful to serve the Lord through times of great personal stress and trials. He was imprisoned for calling out the governor of the country, though he had been the one to introduce the Savior to the world!

Let’s hear what happened to John the Baptist!

**READING Matthew 11:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> When Jesus had finished giving these instructions to His twelve disciples, He went out to teach and preach in towns throughout the region.

<sup>2</sup> John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, <sup>3</sup>“Are You the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?”

<sup>4</sup> Jesus told them, “Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen – <sup>5</sup> the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor. <sup>6</sup> And tell him, ‘God blesses those who do not turn away because of Me.’”

This story of John in prison is tragic! He expected something else for his life! He is as a diseased man with no cure. In prison; a sentence of death.

He expected healing! He expected to be rewarded for serving God so faithfully! He was the voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Messiah! He expected so much more!

But now John wondered, “Was Jesus the One they were waiting for?”

Doubt.

You hear it, don’t you? In John – and in your own heart from time to time?

In a prison. Four walls closing in on him. Do you suppose John’s location has affected him to question Jesus?

The facts to support Christ’s authority were all there, but now some time has passed. John knew Jesus was the Savior the moment he saw Jesus at the Jordan River. Beth Moore comments about this scene: “But time and circumstances can dull the images of your faith and leave you feeling unsure *what* you believe!”

This bout with doubt is a personal, private matter.

John heard about the “wonders” Christ had done *for others*. And we have, too! John’s faith was shaken because he could have used a “wonder” for himself – and he didn’t get it!

John knew with his head that Jesus was the Savior. Sitting in that prison cell, I think he was having trouble knowing it with his heart.

But we understand this. We’ve been around Church people long enough to hear about some pretty amazing works of God! We’ve heard testimonies about how God seemed to reach into a life that was broken and restore it in miraculous ways!

But now, it’s John – and it’s personal.

And it's been you and it's been me. Has your faith ever been shaken because Jesus didn't do for you personally what you thought He would? Some of you have endured long stretches of time suffering in a certain situation while hearing about all sorts of wonderful things Christ was doing *somewhere else!*

And it hurts!

We can be believers for years and then suddenly have a staggering bout with doubt. Overwhelmed with fear or guilt, we'll think, "How in the world could I be doubting after all this time?" It's a horrible feeling! <sup>1</sup>

But these kinds of doubts aren't coming from the head; they come from the heart! Our feelings. Our emotions. Our pain.

John had faith in his head! He knew that he knew that he knew! But the root of his anxiety is with his dilemma: "Why am I sitting in prison while Jesus is going about His business all over the country?" Surely John was wondering how he was supposed to "prepare the way" ...while in prison!

Can we say John was *not* at peace?

Anxious. Stressed. Angry. Unsure and not in control of his life.

Doubts that arise from the heart are so much more tricky, more troublesome – and have caused many to fall away or to detach spiritually as they make their way through Church, through life, going through the motions with little joy or peace!

Today we're focusing on the Fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of peace. The Bible says: "**The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**" (Philippians 4:7)

John did not feel at peace with God.

What does peace look like?

First of all, peace is the absence of struggle. From a Biblical position, peace is wholeness. Peace, God's peace, suggests completeness, health, justice, prosperity, and protection.

You can't get God's peace from the world.

In the final night with His friends, Jesus began to spell out what was soon to happen, and at the end He said: "**I have said this to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!**" (John 16:33)

Listen to this! In the world you will face persecution! You will face trials and problems and crises! But with all that ...we can have *peace*. In Christ you can have peace.

Jesus tells us that peace, God's peace, has something to do with who He is – and courage to believe that Jesus Christ has conquered the world!

The world will try to make us believe that peace is a feeling and not a fact. The Bible reminds us that having "peace with God" is believing the promise that God has a place in heaven for us – not because of what *you've* done, but because of what *Jesus* has done! You can know the peace of God when you're not receiving affirmation from people, when you don't have the possessions the world offers, and when you don't have the position you feel you deserve!

We must make a conscious decision every day to fight the tendency to rely on feelings rather than the fact of the cross and the empty tomb! – D. A. Horton, *Bound to Be Free*

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<sup>1</sup>Sermon resource: *Jesus: 90 Days with the One and Only*; by Beth Moore; Day 29

If Jesus has conquered the world, there were certain problems in this world that had to be overcome. What were they? The problem of sin, this wickedness, this power within me and within the world that really has no place in God's Kingdom. And secondly, the problem of death imposed on God's people! God didn't want that for you and for me. He wants an eternal relationship with you!

So the World Conqueror came to defeat these powers in order that we might be set free from our fear of dying with the assurance that we, too, will rise to new life!

Jesus said: **"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."** (John 14:27) You see, our Savior plants His own character, His Spirit, into our lives!

The Fruit of the Spirit in you includes *peace!*

We live at a time when people you know feel unsafe and insecure! People don't want to be alone. They are frightened and fear limits the joy they experience in their lives.

Jesus wants to say – in fact, has said – to us: "Listen to Me. Did you know I am never afraid? I am never worried, caught off guard, or driven with terror! Did you know that your Lord is at peace always? Did you know My Spirit – the same that lives in Me – lives in you?"

"I have built a wall of protection around you so that the invisible forces will not destroy you! I've saved you from trouble and dangers you've never imagined!

"I am for you. Who can be against you?"

"So who will separate you from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things you are more than conquerors through Me because I love you! So be convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate you from My love!" Romans 8:35-39

Jesus is trying to reach your heart with these words of comfort!

"Don't let your hearts be troubled! Believe in Me. Trust Me to love you whatever might happen! In My Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." (based on John 14:1-3)

Don't you recognize these words?

Why are we letting the world win inside our mind and hearts?

Why are you letting the 24-hour steroid-hyped news-cycle rule your mind?

"Oh!" you say. "Preacher! It's catastrophic! The world has gone to hell in a handbasket! Look at the news! I'm angry! I'm worried! I'm afraid!"

I know. But did you hear Jesus? "Did you know I am never afraid? I am never worried, caught off guard, or driven by terror! Did you know that your Lord is at peace always? Did you know My Spirit – the same that lives in Me – lives in you?"

There's a in the Bible of Jesus asleep in a boat when a terrible storm arises. The disciples, some who were seasoned sailors and fishermen, were terrified, waking Jesus. **"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"** (Mark 4:38-40)

Peace comes from trusting God. Sleeping through a storm, Jesus shows the real meaning

of peace that rises from out of faith and rest. Convinced that God would control the externals, Jesus was able to relax to the point of sleep.

So here we are. We understand the problem. We may even identify ourselves as those who crave peace! From where does this peace come?

Let's close with two Bible passages:

**1. Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** (Romans 5:1)

Peace comes through faith in Jesus Christ!

In fact, peace – this peace that we're talking about – is the declaration of “justification” from the Judge! The sentence of a sinner's death has been lifted for those who surrender their hearts and lives to follow Jesus Christ!

**2. Through Jesus, God was pleased to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of His cross.** (Colossians 1:20)

This verse reminds us that peace comes through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ! **He whose name is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,** (Isaiah 9:6) was the sacrifice and ransom for the sins of the world; for your sins, and mine! God purchased your soul through the blood of Jesus Christ! Death has no place in your future! The penalty for sin has been paid!

Last week we heard that the fruit of joy comes through the victory and resurrection of Christ! In this we rejoice! Today, I'm suggesting that peace – the peace of God in your life – is based on the sacrifice of Jesus, who died for your sins. Through the cross, God grants forgiveness for those who come to Him! And *listen*: It is believing God's promise to forgive our sins that peace finds a place to blossom in your heart!

**So if anyone is in Christ, (Does the Bible speak to you here?) there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them...** (2 Corinthians 5:17-19)

Jesus is trying to reach your heart with these words of comfort! Do you recognize His voice and His promise?

When our emotions threaten to override what our minds know to be true, the doubts that arise can create confusion – if we remain in the doubts. But if we wrestle through them with the Lord Jesus, when we get to the other side of our crisis, we will find within ourselves a growing, radiant faith that helps us find rest in the peace of Christ!

INVITATION: Are you at peace?

The Bible says:

**Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And (in so doing) the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** Philippians 4:6-7 (NRSV)

PRAYER: Lord, You are the Peace-Giver! Through Your grace and mercy and love You offer us what we need so that we might be sustained through any crises, sustained by faith, trusting You to keep us always in Your care!

Max Lucado: “From heaven’s perspective, grace is enough! If God did nothing more than save us from hell, could anyone complain? Having been given eternal life, dare we grumble at anything short of heaven?”