

God's Wonderful Peace

Text: Psalm 125:1-5

Series: The Psalms. [#16]

Pastor Lyle L. Wahl

August 8, 2010

Theme: **God Gives Peace To Those Who Trust Him.**

Introduction

When you write something, how do you try to get your main point across clearly to those who will read it? In some forms of writing we are told to state the topic in the first sentence. Then too, it is suggested that the main point of each paragraph should be clearly stated in its opening line. We even find this at times in the poetry of the Psalms. Psalm 150, for example, opens with "Praise the LORD!" That theme is repeated and expanded, layer upon layer in each of the following verses.

This model, of course, is not, should not always be followed. You would be disappointed if the opening lines of a mystery laid out the mystery and also detailed its solution. Why read the rest of the book? Some Psalms, including the one we are looking at today, do not set out the main theme fully in the opening lines. Psalm 125 opens by describing those who trust in God. That is a major part of the theme, but only part of it. The theme comes clearly in focus, is completed with the last line, "Peace be upon Israel."

Psalm 125 is about peace, *God's Wonderful Peace*. Peace is so important. It has many aspects and can be difficult to describe, let alone experience. In one *Peanuts* episode Lucy and Linus were having a deep discussion. Linus told his sister, "Charlie Brown says that brothers and sisters can learn to get along. He says they can get along the same way mature adults get along. And he says that adults can get along the same way nations get along." After a moment he added, "At this point the analogy breaks down."¹

Yes, the analogy breaks down. At any given moment there are dozens of major armed conflicts in the world. Yes, the analogy breaks down. The reality of peace in *our* worlds, in our hearts and minds, in our relationships, breaks down at times.

While the Old Testament word peace means the absence of conflict, it means much more than that. The basic meaning includes being whole or complete, living in harmony and being fulfilled. It describes being who and what God designed us to be. The main message of this Psalm is that *God gives peace to those who trust Him*. That is what we want and need today, God's gift of His wonderful, perfect peace.

The Gift Of God's Peace.

The Psalm makes it clear that this peace is a gift from God. The chorus of one hymn tells us "Peace, peace, sweet peace, wonderful gift from above, oh, wonderful, wonderful peace, sweet peace, the gift of God's love."²

Look at the opening lines of the Psalm.

“Those who trust in the LORD are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people from this time forth and forever.” (1-2)

You don't find the word *gift* or any form of it here, but the truth of peace as God's gift clearly is here. It's *Question and Answer Time* (you can keep your Bible open).

- Verse 1 speaks of people who are stable, who “cannot be moved” because they trust in ... ? ? [“the LORD”]
- Verse 2 tells us God surrounds, keeps securely ... whom? ? [“His people”]

The qualities of peace noted here are from God. He provides them not as a reward for getting your life all together, nor for a certain amount of selfless, sacrificial service, but as a gift of His love. God's peace is available only as a gift from Him. You can't get it any other way. Consider several examples from different periods in the Old Testament.

- God told Moses to instruct the priests of Israel to give a blessing to the people which included that God would *give* them peace.³
- King David closed Psalm 29 by asserting that God would *bless* His people with peace.⁴
- Later God promised King David that He would *give* political and social peace to Israel when his son Solomon ruled.⁵
- Then God told the Jewish exiles in Babylon through the prophet Haggai that in a future day, possibly referring to Christ's rule on earth, that He would *give* peace to His people.⁶

We see the same thing in the New Testament. Jesus said,

“Peace I *leave* with you; My peace I *give* to you; not as the world gives do I *give* to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”⁷

The peace, the wholeness, the being as God designed us to be, is God's gift.

A second point about this peace is that it is God's gift to people who trust Him. Verse 1 identifies the recipients as “those who trust in the LORD,” people who are, verse 2 tells us “His [God's] people.” The fact that God gives this peace only to those who trust Him is sharpened in the contrast to those who do not trust Him that we see in verse 5.

“But as for those who turn aside to their crooked ways, the LORD will lead them away with the doers of iniquity.”

There are many ways to experience some degree of peace:

- resolving conflict within, or with others can bring peace;

- making a decision can bring peace;
- having clear vision and purpose can bring peace;
- attaining a degree of stability and security in a relationship, in your work or in your finances can bring peace.

But all of these are limited in quality and duration.

This side of the cross we know God’s gift of peace is wrapped up in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This clarifies what it means to trust God. In chapter 4 Paul made the point that Abraham believed in God, that He fully, firmly believed in what God said and promised, that he put his confidence in God, not in himself, others or religion. God credited or counted that to Abraham as righteousness. He gave Abraham righteousness and so he was then as he was designed to be— whole, complete, at peace with God and himself.

If you are looking for peace you need to come to God, to come to Him on His terms by placing your faith in Christ. Then you will be as you ought to be, accepted by God, given life with and from Him which includes His peace. It is all wrapped up in Jesus Christ. As the apostle John wrote,

“And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”⁸

Yes, *God gives peace to those who trust Him.*

The Features Of God’s Peace.

So what is this peace like? What does it bring to us? This Psalm notes five features of God’s peace which, unlike Charlie Brown’s analogies, never break down. First, God’s peace brings stability. Verse 1. “Those who trust in the LORD are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever.” When this Psalm was written Mt. Zion referred to the entire city of Jerusalem, not to just that hill in it. Mountains often are used to picture stability and strength. Jerusalem had a special significance and was identified with God’s people because the tabernacle and later the temple were there. It was that special place of the ongoing presence of God and meeting place with Him.

Just as Jerusalem had stability because of God’s presence, so those who trust Him, who have His presence and peace have stability. They, we, cannot be *moved*. This word translated *moved* is becoming an old friend as it has appeared in several Psalms we have considered. In Psalm 16:8 King David wrote, “I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be *shaken*.” The word *shaken* is the same word as *moved* here in Psalm 125. Psalm 121:3 tells us “He [God] will not allow your foot to *slip*.” Slip, shaken, moved— the same word.

Do you see yourself as being, do you experience being stable, not slipping, not being shaken, not being moved? The answer, without doubt, is “No!” if we think of the full range of experiences and emotions we go through—being happy and sad, celebrating and mourning, being excited and bored. Even if we have a fair degree of stability across the range of our experiences, it’s hard to claim that our experience is as solid, stable as Mt. Zion which doesn’t budge.

The emphasis here is on the *factual, objective* nature of our relationship with God. The one who has placed his trust in God or, as King David stated it, who has placed God at his right hand as the power, the one in control, will not be shaken, will not slip, but is solidly secure in his or her relationship with God. Because of this foundational stability, God then builds stability in and through all the experiences of life. Everyone who belongs to Jesus can then realize His *peace* even in our most shaking and shattering experiences.

Next, and closely related to this stability, God’s peace brings us security. Verse 2. “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people from this time forth and forever.” Jerusalem is a city set in the hills. It’s position was easily defended. It had *security*.

God gives His people security as part of our well being, wholeness, our peace. There are some beautifully reassuring statements of this in the Psalms. Psalm 5:12, says that God “surround[s] [the righteous] with favor as with a shield.” And Psalm 32:10, “...he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him.” Then remember that Jesus told us that no one will, no one can snatch us out of His hand.⁹ And the apostle Paul wrote that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹⁰

Question: Do you believe that God surrounds you, holds you securely always and forever? In the overwhelming sorrow and disasters that engulf you? In the challenges that seem insurmountable? When the thoughts come that you are not worthy, that you have blown it big time too many times?

Let’s personalize this verse with just a slight change. After all, it is meant to be personal! Repeat after me,

“As the mountains surround Jerusalem,”
“so the LORD surrounds *me*”
“from this time forth and forever.”

Let’s do that again, with confidence!

“As the mountains surround Jerusalem,”
“so the LORD surrounds *me*”
“from this time forth and forever.”

This is peace, the peace of knowing God holds you securely.

Moving on, God's gift of peace limits evil. We know from the Bible that God will bring an end to evil when He wraps up time as we now know it. But He also restrains and limits evil now for His glory and as part of His peace which He gives us.

Look at verse 3. "For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest upon the land of the righteous, so that the righteous will not put forth their hands to do wrong." The *scepter* symbolizes rule and domination. The term *resting* refers to settling down and staying. It is like taking up permanent residence in contrast to being a temporary visitor. Without this restraining of evil, the righteous would feel hopeless, not see the value in living rightly and, as the Psalm writer puts it, "put forth their hands to do wrong."

While this referred to the nation of Israel and its enemies, it was not and is not limited to that. The point here is that God is sovereign. He is in control, and part of this is His setting limits on evil. Yes, as Martin Luther's hymn states, "The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still: His kingdom is forever."¹¹ But this also includes God setting limits on the power and devastation of wickedness in our lives and world.

One of the most familiar examples of this in the Bible is Job. Satan charged Job with loving and serving God only for the good things God gave him. If these were taken away, Satan claimed, Job would curse God to His face. God allowed Job to be tested, but *limited* the evil. Satan's forces could not touch Job himself. After round one, where he lost his children, his flocks and herds, he still loved God. Satan claimed that it was only because he couldn't touch Job himself. God again permitted testing, but *limited* the evil by not allowing Satan's forces to take Job's life.

While calamities and atrocities occur, and we may at times think that it could not be any worse, know that it could be, it *would* be if God were not limiting evil.¹²

And then God's peace also brings His blessings. The Psalm writer prays for this here. Verse 4. "Do good, O LORD, to those who are good and to those who are upright in their hearts." None of us would question that God's peace is in and of itself a blessing as we read in Psalm 29:11, "The LORD will give strength to His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace."

As great as this is, there is more. God's gift of peace opens up more blessings—all the blessings He has in store for those who trust in Him. We read this in Psalm 84:12, "O LORD of hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in You!" And also in the beautiful words of Psalm 5:12. "For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD, You surround him with favor as with a shield." We turn ahead to the New Testament where the opening lines of Ephesians tell us that God "... has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."¹³ The apostle Peter wrote that God has given us precious and magnificent promises in Christ¹⁴ which, Paul wrote, are all "Yes" in Christ.¹⁵ You see, all of our spiritual blessings, every blessing in every area of life you and I receive as God's children is because we have His life, His *peace*.

God's peace brings stability, security, limits on evil, blessings and judgment on the wicked. Verse 5 begins "But as for those who turn aside to their crooked ways, the LORD will lead them away with the doers of iniquity." There are two descriptions here of those who are judged. First, "those who turn aside to their crooked ways." *Crooked* ways in contrast to the straight way of truth, the way of God. They walk in, live by the crookedness of sin. Then, "the doers of iniquity." This description clarifies and fills out the first. Those who follow the crooked ways are indeed living in, doing iniquity, evil, sin which God, who is sovereign and holy, will judge. This reminds us of Psalm 1 where we read in verse 5 "... the wicked will not stand in the judgment..."

There could not be true, perfect peace without a final, just judgment on evil and those who do it, on those who reject God's grace and truth, His mercy and righteousness in Jesus Christ. The wicked often prosper, live and die without being brought to the bar of justice. But they and their wickedness will not, cannot escape God's just judgment. God does not delight in the judgment of those who reject Him, but He will judge them.¹⁶ Psalm 145:20 declares that "The LORD keeps all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy." Jesus said that when He judges those who have not bowed their hearts before Him, who have not received Him, He will tell them "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels."¹⁷ He also stated that "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."¹⁸

And so there will be peace for those who have trusted in God because as incomprehensibly tragic as everlasting judgment is, things will be as they should be—righteousness vindicated and established; wickedness defeated and judged.

Conclusion.

God gives peace to those who trust Him. This Psalm is focused on what the gift of God's peace is more than the *process* of experiencing it here and now. And so, I want to tie this up with two thoughts from Philippians 4:4-9. Paul writes,

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And *the peace of God*, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and *the God of peace will be with you.*"

First, the *peace of God* guarding your heart and mind is experienced as you are rejoicing in God, in His steadfast lovingkindness to you, being gentle with others, not being a *prickly porcupine*, as you turn to God in prayer in all your desires and difficulties rather than keeping them in and worrying about them. *As you do this*, God gives His word, He promises you that “*the peace of God*, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard *your heart[s] and mind[s]* in Christ Jesus.”

Then too, the *God of peace* Himself will be with you as you focus on only that which is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, worthy of praise. As you focus on these qualities, God gives His word, He promises you that He Himself, “the *God of peace* will be with you.”

As you reflect now on these things and respond to God, do that in two directions. Thank God for His *gift of wonderful peace*, of wholeness, of well-being, with stability, security, His limits on evil, His blessing and also His judgment on the wicked ... this is His *gift to you*. As well, bring to God your lack of the experience of His peace. Ask Him to help you to accept, to grow in understanding and knowing how wonderful His peace is, how certain it is as His gift to you, and the experience of it, being specific with the things that you struggle with the most in trying to accept or experience God’s gift of peace.

¹ As in:

Robert L. Short. *The Gospel According To Peanuts*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000, page 49.

² Peter Philip Bilhorn. *Sweet Peace, The Gift Of God’s Love*. Public Domain.

³ Numbers 6:26.

⁴ Psalm 29:11.

⁵ 1 Chronicles 22:9.

⁶ Haggai 2:9

⁷ John 14:27.

⁸ 1 John 5:11-12.

⁹ John 10:28-29.

¹⁰ Romans 8:38-39.

¹¹ Martin Luther. *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. cf. Psalm 56:4, 11; 118:6.

¹² cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:6-10.

¹³ Ephesians 1:3.

¹⁴ 2 Peter 1:4.

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 1:18-20.

¹⁶ cf. Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9.

¹⁷ Matthew 25:41.

¹⁸ Matthew 25:46.

© 2010 Lyle L. Wahl

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995
by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.