



Source of Peace

Matthew 8:18-27

“Pray for world peace.” If I have heard it once, I have heard it said a thousand times. It is said so often, yet without a desire to act in such a way as to make peace a reality. When we think of peace, we consider it in the sense of peace as the opposite of war. Peace, as we define it, is the absence of conflict. We say it is living without the violent pressures that would change our course—the resolution of the storms and anxieties of our living. What we do not perceive, perhaps, is that such a definition requires that peace be nonexistent, if we know it only as the absence of things like conflict, turbulence, and anxiety. In themselves, our normal definitions for peace do not give peace a full reality. In Christ, however, peace has its own identity and existence. Peace is something real, much more than the mere absence of conflict. The question is, from where comes such a reality we claim to desire, even when we cannot define or understand it?

Those who came before Jesus were still focused on their life circumstances. There were between two worlds, but they did not understand that Jesus’ message called them to a completely distinct reality than the one to which they were accustomed. They heard Jesus’ words and were happy with his message. At the same time, however, they were preoccupied with the concerns of their day to day lives. They wanted the security of a shelter; they prioritized their familial ties; they sought God’s peace while their lives revolved around their priorities and anxieties, all of which distanced them from divine peace. It was necessary for them to be changed into new creatures in God, but they only wanted a splash of paint on the walls of their lives.

The teacher of the law recognized something different in Jesus, but he wanted that distinction to remain bound within his formulas and rituals. He wanted to adapt Jesus’ message to his routines and way of life. He wanted a few changes to alter his appearance, as long as they were not too drastic. Jesus responded in a manner that recognized that he was a slave to his way of life and of the other things that gave him security. He could not comprehend that the ties that bound him to his traditions and routines countered the very peace of the gospel Jesus preached. He wanted the blessing of peace before God, but was not ready to accept it according to divine parameters and forms. A transformation of his all was necessary in order for God’s peace to change his being from within.

Another disciple wanted peace with God, but that peace should not run afoul of his relationships, dependence, and the expectations of his relatives. He wanted God to place the gospel on hold while he wrapped himself further in his family’s expectations. This would not be God’s peace, but his own peace come to be adopted by Jesus as a divine blessing—peace, human style. He wanted the blessings of peace, but not its procedures, nor its character in daily life. It was as though he wanted a car, but without filling it with gasoline, without maintaining it, and without obeying traffic laws. Taken in such a way, a car is worthless. We must maintain it and use it according its proper manner of operation.

So is peace with God. It lives within us and guides us to a change in focus toward the reality behind its existence. It does not look upon circumstances, as we commonly do, but takes us to another reality, the internal or spiritual one. While we focus on difficult situations, potential problems, and what we call crises, peace has another focus. It sees the character of God with divine purposes of love, grace, and blessing. With a wholly other perspective, it confidently trusts amid the circumstances we attempt so hard to avoid.

Jesus entered the boat with the disciples. They entered their routines, for a good portion of them were fishermen and accustomed to life upon the waves. Amid their comfort, the raised sail and went about their normal way, moving Jesus across the waters. All was well. They had been with Jesus while he taught the people. They had heard while he told some they were useless to him as disciples. They were content for being the chosen ones, even among more capable folk. Secure, aware of their special position, they reflected on Jesus' words while their hands did the work of always.

A wind began to rise. There was no problem, as they were well accustomed to that. Jesus had lain down to sleep and the waves simply offered them a challenge and something to do. While the wind strengthened and the waves grew, their energies and strength focused even more on the task at hand. They did everything according to their norms of action in a storm. Their efforts did not meet the measure of the tempest. Frustration and anxiety began to fill their thoughts. They looked at Jesus sleeping amid the mayhem. They began to question why he did not awaken to give them a hand. There was much to do to protect the boat and their lives. Jesus did not seem to give importance to the critical moment they were experiencing.

They went to awaken him. Who knows if maybe they wanted another hand with the ropes, sails and rudder. Who knows if they expected him to pray or throw himself overboard like Jonah from the boat leaving Joppa. Who knows what they thought would happen on waking Jesus. For sure, more than anything they wanted to be certain that Jesus was awake and aware of what was happening to them. What they did not expect was exactly how Jesus reacted to their cries and the tempest.

To begin with, he did nothing regarding the storm. He looked at them, his disciples, not to the circumstances, the winds, and the waves. He looked at the anguish on their faces and the fear in their hearts. He looked more deeply, as well. He looked at their lack of faith—their failure of confidence in God. This was what caught his attention, as if the waves invading the boat and the winds that whipped it were not in the least important. “Why are you so afraid?” were his first words. He did not respect their fear in the face of uncertainty and the disaster in which they found themselves! That did not seem important to him at all. He concerned himself with a completely different question. “What little faith you have in God!”

Danger came, and the disciples looked around themselves. Danger came and Jesus looked to God. It was his confidence that mattered. From it came the peace the disciples lacked. His peace was something created by God amid the chaos of the tempest. This peace was already present amid the tempest, but the disciples did not see it for lack of faith placed in God. It was necessary for them that Jesus order the wind and waves to cease so that they might see the divine peace. When Jesus changed the winds into a still, they began to question Jesus' identity. They had followed him, but they still did not recognize him for his true identity.

So it is often with us. We say we believe and trust in Jesus Christ. We say we have faith in him as Lord and Savior. Such faith is unimportant until we change the focus of our attention. It transforms itself into peace amid our difficulties when we raise our attention from circumstances to Him, who is Lord of all circumstances. Real peace has little to do with difficult situations. It has everything to do with faith in Christ, who gave his life that we might live according to a new confidence in God. Are we ready to change the focus of our attention from the waves to the one who is the source of peace?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*