

# Moments *for* You

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Theme: Peace



## PERFECT PEACE

We live in a world in which it seems most people can't agree on anything. There is something though that certainly is desired by virtually everyone—peace. Peace is a word that is peaceful and positive. Peace is something that many strive for but lack. Every person wants to have peace of mind, and peace with God is something that all people need, even if they don't recognize it. The two are interrelated. A person who has peace with God can achieve peace of mind. The Bible even talks about the possibility of a perfect peace.

The prophet Isaiah wrote during a time of terrible turmoil. He spoke passionately of judgment and hope. Amid his many words comes the formula for perfect peace. It is at once simple and profound. "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3). Other versions state that God will keep in perfect (complete, genuine) peace those whose minds are steadfast or whose thoughts are fixed on the Lord.

There are several elements here that are worth noting. The source of peace is God Himself. He is the One who can keep His children in perfect peace. Another aspect that is in view is the fact that the believer must choose a mindset that is focused on God. When we pursue people and things as the world does, we are failing to do what is best for ourselves. That is why we are commanded to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:2). Finding peace begins in the mind. We are to take every thought captive in obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). It isn't

hard to have our minds on God when we are in church or are looking for help in a crisis, but *perfect peace* only comes to those whose minds stay on Him. When our minds are stayed on God, we are more likely to be able to trust in Him. That inner tranquility that God provides then enables us to continue to trust.

The hymn writer penned, "Oh, what peace we often forfeit; oh, what needless pain we bear." How foolish it is to miss out on peace when God wants to provide us with perfect peace. "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). We may not understand God's peace, but we certainly should pursue it. —Lee Seese

## THE HOPE OF PEACE

Imagine the country you once cherished now divided, broken, overrun by corrupt leadership, imperiled by vast international powers, and seemingly on the brink of collapse. Imagine the best of your leaders crippled by poor character, indecision, and unwise international alliances. The political and cultural conditions in Jerusalem in the eighth century BC were shaped by these dark concerns and provided the immediate background to the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7. The northern kingdom of Israel had turned against her sister to the south, Judah, in an ill-advised coalition with Syria, a coalition that would lead to the destruction of both of its parties at the hands of the Assyrian army. Judah was left alone with diminishing prospects for survival.

Into this dire situation, Isaiah spoke an oracle of hope about a child who

would be born to the kingdom and bring national and international restoration to the world.

The passage begins by assuring the southern audience that the northern kingdom will be included in the restoration from exile (9:1). The coming restoration will include all the children of Israel, even those tribes of the rebellious northern kingdom (see Ezekiel 37:16-17). Even for the north and its capital, Samaria, the darkness of exile will one day come to an end, and the sunrise of restoration and the new King will appear. The gospel of Matthew shows how kingdom restoration comes in the ministry of Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:12-16). He is the light shining in the gloom.

From Isaiah's perspective, what is important is that this coming restoration will see a reunification of the two kingdoms of Israel under a King in the line of David. The Child's birth will mark the end of their suffering in exile. The Child in Isaiah 9 is the new King who will inaugurate the restoration period for the people of God after the long years of exile.

Isaiah 9:1-7 evokes a coronation ceremony in which royal titles are read aloud before an audience of subjects and dignitaries. In this case, each title depicts the superlative characteristics of the new regent that will serve God as He establishes His future kingdom as the light that replaces the darkness of the coming exile.

**Wonderful Counselor.** The meaning of this title might seem obscure to a modern audience. A counselor in this case involves a master of wisdom and its teachings. This sage-counselor would have served in the court of the king, who in turn ruled as the head of the judiciary for the land. The restoration King, however, will excel in all areas of wisdom, much like Solomon

of old, but Himself will be a counselor of miraculous proportions whose counsel is accompanied by affirming wonders (Matthew 12:42; 1 Corinthians 1:24). As such, He will resolve the problem of the poor leadership of old.

**Mighty God.** This title indicates that the King will be identified with the divine Ruler of all. This King will not be like Israel's first king, Saul, who was "little in [his] own eyes" (1 Samuel 15:17), an insecurity that caused him to lead the nation toward his own desires and not the will of the Lord. The restoration King will be identified with the sovereign divine King from whom He, and every other worldly power, receives His authority on earth (Matthew 28:18).

**Everlasting Father.** This title involves another feature of the throne: the King as the father of the nation. Christians will remember that the fatherhood of God is the primary theme in the prayer that Jesus teaches to His disciples (Matthew 6:9). In the prayer, the believer is encouraged to pray to God as a Father whose kingdom will come and whose royal will ought to be done in the earthly as well as heavenly realm. In Isaiah 9, "father" language is not meant to connote close intimacy as much as the reverence with which one regards the King (John 10:30; 14:9-10).

**Prince of Peace.** This last title refers to the abundance and wholeness of the restoration kingdom to come. The title "prince" is not necessarily a title of lesser authority in the government than "king" but rather includes a larger group of ruling officials. Not only will the coming son of David be King, He will be a ruler who ushers in a period of shalom—peace—of welfare and community wholeness for the kingdom. Justice will be done. The poor and the oppressed will be given

rest. And each will live fully and wholly toward their God-ordained vocations (John 17:20-23; Galatians 3:27-29; Philippians 1:6).

For the prophet Isaiah, the assurance of this restoration kingdom and its King provided a great cause for hope and celebration. His were dark times, and they were going to become darker still, but the Lord in His “zeal” (9:7) would not allow the darkness to last forever. We have much in common with Isaiah’s audience. The longer God seemed absent in the grim realities of exile, the more audacious was the claim that a restoration King was coming. Our claim that the King is returning is likewise bold, but we know the King of whom Isaiah was speaking. We have known Him, and He is coming back for us, and His return will be glorious. — Scott Redd

## PRINCE OF PEACE

*“For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given ... and His name shall be called ... Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:6-7).*

During His time on earth, Jesus restored peace everywhere He went. He calmed tumultuous storms; He brought healing to the sick; He raised the dead to life; He forgave sinners their sins.

Isaiah prophetically calls the coming Messiah the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), and the angels announcing the birth of Jesus declare “on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” (Luke 2:14).

Jesus came to restore not just peace in the sense of an ending of hostility, but a rich, full, abiding harmony of life. His second coming will bring wholeness as He intended His creation to be when He first set the universe in motion.

In contrast to human history filled with war, gloom, and despair, the reign of Jesus will be marked by peace, wholeness, and delight. Isaiah 9 describes the shift from gloom and darkness to the Messianic Age, and Malachi describes a time when “the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” (Malachi 4:2). Jesus’ rule will restore well-being to individuals and to society as a whole when He brings worldwide peace in His future kingdom on the new earth.

But Jesus’ reign of peace is not reserved for His future kingdom; it begins here and now for all those who follow Him. The Prince of Peace brings us peace with God, the end of spiritual enmity and striving to secure God’s favor through our good works, as well as peace of mind and heart, a state of being at rest despite difficult circumstances because we know that God is in control. In fact, the very night Jesus was betrayed, in His last teaching moments with His disciples, Jesus promised them peace, not as the world offers it, but as only He can give (John 14:27). No matter what would happen, they could rest and enjoy sweet fellowship with God, which would then create ripple effects in their relationships with the world around them.

We live out the present reality of God’s kingdom, pushing back the kingdom of darkness and bringing to fruition the peace of Jesus. Just as He is the Prince of Peace, so He calls us to be makers of peace all around us (Matthew 5:9). Though the world may be caught up in anxiety and worry, we can rest securely in the knowledge that Jesus is making all things right, and we can participate with Him in bringing peace to a broken world as we look forward to the future kingdom of peace. —Asheritha Ciuciu

## PEACE WITH GOD

Before we can understand what it means to have peace with God, we must recognize that human beings in our natural state are enemies of God. Because we inherited a sin nature from our first parents, Adam and Eve (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12), we are born with a disposition to please ourselves and be our own gods. That rebellious nature sets us at odds with our perfect Creator. His just nature cannot overlook our sin; justice demands punishment (Romans 3:23; 6:23). We cannot create peace with God because our best efforts on our best day are nothing but filthy rags compared to His holiness (Isaiah 64:6). So, in our sinful state, we cannot be reconciled—we cannot have peace with God—no matter how hard we try.

God took the initiative in pursuing peace with us by sending His Son to earth. Jesus lived a perfect life, His crucifixion paid for the sins of all who would trust in Him (Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21), and His resurrection guarantees our justification before God (Romans 4:25). Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and He is the One who gives us peace with God. That's why the message of salvation in Christ is called the "gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15).

Peace with God means that our great sin debt has been paid and God sees us as righteous (Romans 3:22). We are no longer enemies but beloved children (1 John 3:2). His holy nature can have fellowship with us because He sees us "in Christ."

Peace with God means our consciences are cleared (Hebrews 10:22; Titus 3:5). The overwhelming weight of guilt that plagued us all is gone, placed on Jesus on the cross (Colossians 2:14). The shame that we rightly

felt for the wicked deeds we had done was carried by Jesus. God the Father adopts us as His own children and invites us to "with confidence draw near to the throne of grace" to commune with Him and ask for what we need (Hebrews 4:16). For the Christian, maintaining a sense of peace with God means we keep our ongoing sins and failures confessed (1 John 1:9). We don't have to keep confessing in order to establish peace with God; Jesus did that at the cross when we believed. Truly born-again people live in ongoing attitudes of repentance so that no sin will take root to defile them again (John 3:3; Romans 6:1-4). Unconfessed sin ruins the joyful fellowship between a child of God and his Father.

Human beings were created to live in peace with God. Sin destroyed that peace and still destroys it for everyone who refuses Jesus' offer of salvation. However, anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord, believes in their heart that Jesus is the only way to God, and is willing to surrender to Him as Savior and Lord can have peace with God (Romans 10:9-10,13; John 3:16; Acts 2:21). —GotQuestions.org, condensed

## PEACE THROUGH JESUS

*"Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2).*

Jesus Christ has come into the world, lived a life of perfect righteousness, died in our place to bear the condemnation for our sins and risen to vindicate the success of His work. Our connection with the righteousness of Christ and the sin-bearing death of Christ is by faith alone. Justification is a sentence of acquittal, and the

imputation of God's righteousness in Christ—not guilty before God's justice, but righteous. God "made Him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Because of justification we now have peace with God.

How are we to understand this peace with God? The picture I think Paul has in his mind is brought into sharper focus in Romans 5:10, "If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life." What this shows is that the picture in Paul's mind is that there is enmity between us and God. God is angry at us for our sin and we are hostile to God in rebellion against His authority (Romans 8:7-8). Romans 1:18 says, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." God's anger at our ungodliness is our main problem in life. If God is resolved to pour out His wrath on us, we are in a terrifying position.

Our only hope is if God may provide a way of reconciliation. Romans 5:10 says that He has: "We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." This happened because Christ bore our sins and fulfilled our righteousness. Now by faith we are united to Christ, so His righteousness is imputed (credited) to us. And the result is peace. God is no longer angry with us. We are reconciled. There is no condemnation.

All the power that once stood in the service of God's anger against us now stands in the service of His grace toward us. So Paul says in Romans 5:2, "Through [Christ] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace

in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Not only do we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, but also through Him we have something else, something more.

Through this peace with God we have entered into a sphere and power of grace which keeps us standing until we inherit the glory of God. Peace is one way to describe our new relation to God. We have peace with Him. But there is something greater, namely, an experience of the omnipotence of God acting not against us, but for us.

This is something more than justification, and something more than peace. This is the mighty sphere and influence and dominion of transforming, empowering, preserving grace—God's infinite power no longer against us but for us. —John Piper, condensed

## GRACE, THEN PEACE

In every one of his New Testament letters, Paul greets the recipient with some variation of "grace and peace"—combining the standard Greek greeting, *charis* (grace), with the standard Hebrew greeting, *shalom* (peace). Taken together and in the right order, these two words give us a window into mysteries unknown apart from God's revelation. Specifically, they reveal the trajectory of creation and provide guidance for how to live.

Grace is God's disposition of kindness and favor toward the world. It all begins with God's grace. The grace brings peace: peace with God, peace with other believers, and a broader peace throughout creation. Again, the order is critical: grace then peace. Grace first. Peace follows.

Other religions operate in the reverse: peace then grace. If I can gain peace with God (or the gods, or a supernatural force) through a set of

practices, then I can secure his (or their) favor. Sometimes, Christians function with a peace-then-grace mentality. If I can achieve peace with God through being a good Christian, then I can unlock His grace in my life.

Aside from inviting a host of insecurities and anxieties into our lives, such an approach misses the heart of the Christian faith. We are saved by grace, which subsequently brings peace to our lives—both an objective peace as we experience forgiveness from God, and a subjective peace as our hearts learn to rest in Christ’s finished work.

—Casey Shutt, condensed

## SEEK PEACE

*“Whoever desires to love life and see good days ... let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:10-11).*

The good life is turning from evil and doing good. If you want to love life and see good days, if you really want to live and love the good life, then turn from evil to do good. The good life is not sex, drugs and parties. The good life is not doing your own thing, whatever makes you feel good no matter what God thinks about it. The good life is doing what is *good*—this word means excellent in quality. We must do what expresses a deep-down virtue.

And then Peter says, “Let him seek peace.” The word here for seeking in the original Greek is the strongest verb, the strongest form of seeking. The emphasis is: “Let him seek with all his might.” This intensity is very important. “And let him pursue peace,” includes another intense verb that means to hunt. If you are a follower of Christ, you are told by the Word of God to do everything you can to make a persistent, intense effort to be a peacemaker.

The Beatitudes remind us of

that, don’t they? Matthew 5:9 says, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” So many Christians are doing the opposite today on so many fronts. We are to make peace as much as is possible without compromising truth. Romans 14:17 says, “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” The kingdom of God should be known by its peace. And we are the citizens of the kingdom, we must be the peacemakers. 2 Timothy 2:22 says, “Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace.” James 3:17 tells us that we are to align with God’s wisdom, which is “peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” Why? Because that’s characteristic of spiritual wisdom from above. We are to be peacemakers.

Romans 12:18 says the same thing in other words: “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” Romans 14:19, “Let us pursue what makes for peace.” This is repeated throughout the Scripture: “Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11). On and on it goes. We are to be peacemakers. We are to pursue it, we are to hunt after it. We are to do everything possible to make peace in the congregation of God’s redeemed and with the people who are around us.

One last point: to remain diligent in our pursuit of peace, we must have the right incentive. 1 Peter 3:12 continues: “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayer.” Peter is simply saying, “Look, you can live like this, you don’t have to retaliate, you don’t have to get your own pound of flesh,

you don't have to take vengeance into your own hands, you don't have to live that way. You can simply have a right attitude, a gracious and humble and sympathetic, harmonious attitude, you can give back love to your enemies, even though they give you hate, don't retaliate. You can live under the authority of the Word of God with a controlled tongue and controlled lips, turning away from evil, doing good and pursuing peace and hunting after it no matter how intensely you must do that. You can live like that without fear because whatever difficulty you get into, you don't need to be the one who gets you out. All you need to do is let the Lord know and He's ready to hear your prayer." What a tremendous promise, what a glorious truth.

—John MacArthur, adapted

## A PRAYER FOR PEACE

Dear Lord Jesus, were I to sit down to list the titles I would instinctively give You, I'm not sure "preacher" would be on my initial list. But if anyone deserves that name, it is You. What is Christmas? It's You coming nearer than near to us in Your incarnation. You have come to us from Heaven preaching peace—the peace for which we are desperate; the peace only You could purchase; the peace of which You alone are Prince. You give a peace the world cannot give (John 14:27). We greet You this day, O glorious herald of hope and healer of our hearts.

As a preacher, Your primary text was Your life, Lord Jesus. For You, Yourself, are our peace. It was while we were still enemies, You reconciled us to God by Your death (Romans 5:10). We were living life apart from You, "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no

hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). We weren't seeking God, He was seeking us. And on the cross, You destroyed—obliterated, annihilated—the hostility between God and us (Ephesians 2:14). You are the Peacemaker of all peacemakers, Jesus. We praise and adore You!

Now, in Your resurrection glory, You're the One who is constantly preaching the gospel of peace to us, through the widest array of preachers imaginable. Forgive us when we look to mere human preachers to do what You alone can do. For only You, Jesus, can apply the gospel to hearts that are dead in sin and trespasses (Ephesians 2:1-7) and hearts, like mine, that are ever prone to stray from the gospel of grace. We praise You for Your tenacity and faithfulness.

Jesus, You also preach the gospel to us as those who participate in a wide array of broken relationships. You've come, not just to reconcile us to God, but also to one another. You are committed to destroying all kinds of hostilities and reconciling all kinds of people—in the body of Christ, in our families, in our communities, even with our enemies. In this present season of Christmas, many of us have witnessed and wept over the brokenness and disconnect that marks too many of our relationships. We believe: help our unbelief.

Glorious Prince of Peace, You who one day will reconcile wolves and lambs, leopards and goats, calves and lions—give us the desire, the humility, and the grace to be a people of peace in this upcoming New Year. As far as it is in our own power (Romans 12:18-21) and as far as the power of the gospel will take us, free us for living as agents of Your reconciling love. So we pray, in Your peerless and peaceful name.

—Scotty Smith