



Light of the World

Part 2 – Peace

Pastor Ted Cunningham

I wake up every morning in the Cunningham home to a mini business meeting with my wife. Does anybody here know what I'm talking about? She gets up before anyone else in the family. This is what I love about my wife: she's a strong woman. If you're married to a strong woman, I want you to raise your hand here and across the campus. We love being married to a strong woman. I love it. She's passionate, organized, detailed, and she keeps us all right on target.

My wife gets up 30-45 minutes before I do. We have a coffee pot with a grinder on it. So, about 5:30 am, the whole house, including the dog, hears the grinder go off for about 45 seconds, which means, "Y'all need to get moving!" Jerry Falwell, the President of our university, when we were in college, said, "You are out of the will of God if you are still in bed at 6:00 am."

Amy must have taken that very seriously because she has had her quiet time and prepared the days agenda. And it is a business meeting. I kind of sneak out to get my cup of coffee and I go over to the sun room. My wife, because she just loves it, is just giddy; she got everything figured out for the whole day. I'm not exaggerating; she's usually very excited. She wants me to have a first sip or two of coffee, but she very excitedly goes, "Whenever you're ready, let me know."

I sit down, prop my feet up, the dog lays on my legs, and she goes, "I'd like to start our meeting with some old business. I'll begin reading the minutes from yesterday's meeting."

Here's what I love about my wife. My wife understands personal responsibility, so the first item on the agenda usually flows out of her quiet time and she shares with me two to three things she's working on personally. And it's something that she read, it's something that the Lord shared, something she has prayed, and she goes, "Here's what I'm working on." She always starts there, but then I always get this feeling like *it wouldn't hurt you, Ted, if you did a little bit of this too... I'm just saying*. But she doesn't say that.

Then she goes, "Moving on, our next item on the agenda is because of the way we ate yesterday, we'll be starting Whole 30 today." I tell her, "I never would have had that Mother Heifer at the Pour House had I known I was going to prison for 30 days." Listen, there are a lot of good diets out there, but Whole 30 is of Satan. Can I get an amen on that one? I hate Whole 30, but we're going to do that. She'll sometimes go, "You're out of order."

So, she keeps going. I shared with her that I was going to be sharing this today and she wrote this whole thing. She said, "Yeah, don't remind them how often I ask you to retake the Enneagram Test." She'll say, "There are some things changing in your personality and I want to get ahead of that if I can." No lie. She'll go, "Last item on the agenda is I scheduled you a physical for this week. You can choose between a coloscopy or prostate exam; that's up to you. But don't worry; I'm going to sum all this up in an email for you, Ted. I'll get this to you. I'll send the minutes from this meeting and the agenda for tomorrow's meeting."

Now this is my favorite part. This is how our meeting ends. This is no lie; I'm not exaggerating this one bit. She will say, "Preach to me." What that means is what are you working on? Give me your outline. Give me the scripture. Give me the notes. Preach to me. So, this week, you can imagine how much fun it was in the business meeting. When she got done with her agenda for me, she goes, "Preach to me." And I went, "Peace! Peace and quiet." And then I said, "I'm starting with the illustration, do you know why women live longer than men? Because men want to rest in peace!" And all the men said... Amen.

Okay let's move on. And some of you are in trouble just because you laughed at that very moment. How many of you... When we watch Everybody Loves Raymond and I start belly laughing, my wife will simply yell from across the room, "You can't relate."

We are talking about peace. Let's start with all the benefits of peace that we learn from scripture. Proverbs gives us so many benefits such as mental wellness. Emotional wellbeing flows from peace. Proverbs 12 says, ***20 Deceit is in the hearts of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace...*** which is the last part of today's message ***...have joy.***

We're going to talk today about what it means to be a peacemaker. We have to talk about two different types of peace first before we get there. This peace and joy brings with it physical benefits – ***30 A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.*** – Proverbs 14

Have you ever been around a person that no matter what they're going through, they are full of joy? No matter what circumstance hit them because it's the same circumstances hitting them that has hit you. Yet, you watch them and you're like, *man why can they walk through this? Why can they handle this like they are handling it?*

The last one is the relational benefits. ***1 Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.*** – Proverbs 17 I can't think of a better passage leading us through December. We like to use the term hustle and bustle, but what's the point of all the gifts and all the crazy and all the money spent if the house is full of conflict and strife. It's better to have very little and be able to sit in peace and quiet.

I don't know how many of you have bumper stickers. I'm not allowed to put bumper stickers on my car because they would be changed out often for whatever level of snarky that I'm at. But I've never been a big fan of Christian bumper stickers. That's mainly because I've never heard one testimony from someone who came to the Lord through a bumper sticker. I've just never heard that, and I think sometimes one sentence doesn't have enough time to explain anything.

Maybe you've seen this bumper sticker at some point in life. "Know Jesus|Know Peace No Jesus|No peace." Here's why I struggle with that bumper sticker a little bit. This is going to be a summary of what many of you, this time of year and maybe throughout most of your life, have experienced. You would say, "Ted, I believe in Jesus, but have no peace. I know Jesus, but I don't have this peace that we're talking about." "Ted, when circumstances hit me, when life's situations come at me, I fall apart immediately, but yet I place faith in Jesus. I have trusted the Lord as my Savior. Why is it I still struggle with the peace of God in my life?"

Today, we want to look at two types of peace that the Bible talks about. We want to look at **Peace with God and Peace of God**, and how you can have one without the other, how you can say, "I know Jesus, but why is it I don't have peace and why is it my relationships are chaotic?" "Why is it I jump from job to job and never find peace in any job?" "Why is it I turn to medication and turn to drugs and turn to alcohol? I turn to all sorts of ways to medicate my life when circumstances hit me even though I know I place faith in Jesus and I know I'm a Christian, but I have no peace?"

Peace with God. This is my favorite definition of peace with God. **Jesus ended your war with God.** I love this. Jesus ended your war with God. If you have your bibles, turn to Romans 5. We're going to see the first peace we're looking at. Peace with God is judicial. The second one is the peace of God is experiential. With the judicial, you are declared righteous.

We read in Roman 5, **1 Therefore, since we have been justified** (declared righteous) **through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...** At the moment of your salvation, when you place faith alone is Christ alone, you are promised peace with God. Your war with God has ended. If you read further down to Verse 10 of Romans 5, we learn who we were before Christ. Before Christ, we were an enemy of God. Romans 5: 10 says it this way, **10 For if, while we were God's enemies...**

Can I tell you... The Christmas Story is not that you are on God's naughty list. Or you've done some things that kind of frustrate him. That's not the Christmas story. The Christmas story is before Christ, you were an enemy of God, alienated from God, you have engaged in hostile deeds against God, but it says, **...we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son...** The war with God is over, it is finished. That's why Jesus said it. He didn't say, "I am finished," He said, "It is finished." **...how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!**

Do we have any southern gospel fans in here today or watching online? My favorite group is the Gaither Vocal Band of course. I have listened to this song maybe 50 times this week. It is a song from my childhood and then in college. Jerry Falwell had Doug Oldham sing this song with his big bass voice. With any good Gaither Vocal song, you start with the bass and you go to the baritone and then you go to the lead and you end with the tenor. If you don't have a tenor doing this song, you will never hear the gospel, that's kind of the bottom line on that. You've got to have the tenor hitting the note at the end. This song is called *It is Finished*.

I remember Thomas Road would walk out, as he was up there in years, and he was very animated with his hands. He would sing using his hands. I can still picture it in my mind, him singing the first two lines. "There's a line..." And he'd step way back and gesture with his hand and go, "... drawn through the

ages...” And he’d shake his hand out there and we’re all like, “YES!” “*And on that line stands an old rugged cross. And on that cross a battle is raging.*” Bill and Gloria Gaither, just perfect words. “*To gain a man’s soul for it’s loss. On one side marks the forces of evil, all the demons and devils of hell; on the other the angles of glory, and they meet on Golgotha’s hill.*”

I love this. Now we’re moving into the baritone. “*The earth shakes with the force of the conflict; the sun refuses to shine. For there hangs God’s Son in the balance, and then through the darkness he cries. ‘It is finished! The battle is over. It is finished! There’ll be no more war. It is finished! The end of the conflict. It is finished! And Jesus is Lord.’*”

Jesus is the reason we have peace with God. This is the story of Christmas. He ended the war. If you have placed faith in Jesus and you are a follower of Jesus, you are a Christian and you are no longer alienated from God. You’re no longer an enemy of God. You are a child of God.

Peace with God, here’s where it starts to get a little confusing sometimes when you talk to folks. Peace with God is promised to those who believe. This is the judicial act. It’s promised. But going back to the tension of peace with God and peace of God, some of you might be asking, “If my war with God ended the moment I placed faith in Jesus, why does the war with myself and others rage on? Why do I not experience this peace of God? Well, the song isn’t over.

Let me bring it back. We are now to the lead part. “*Yet in my heart, the battle was raging; not all prisoners of war have come home.*” That’s a great line. “*These were battlefields of my own making; I didn’t know that the war had been won. Oh, but then I hear the King of the Ages had fought all my battles for me, and victory was mine for the claiming, and now, praise His name I am free!*” You see, we can have peace *with* God, but not have the peace *of* God.

Peace of God. So, with Jesus ending our war with God, let’s look at what it means to have the peace of God. The peace of God defined would be *resting in Christ in all circumstances*. The world would tell you if you don’t have peace, change your circumstances. Right? Get out of that job. If you don’t have peace in it, go find a job that’s going to give you peace. If you don’t have peace in your marriage, get out of that marriage. Go find another marriage and find peace there.

Be very careful this time of year when you start hearing things like “If you think it, you can make it happen.” Be very careful. Right now, let’s all think about ending the pandemic... It’s still here. The world wants to offer us, “Change your circumstances,” but the peace of God comes through Christ in any and all circumstances. It comes through job loss, it comes through a medical crisis with insurance, a medical crisis without insurance. It comes in a job loss with a \$600.00 bonus in the unemployment and without it. It comes with a failing business with PPP or without PPP. It comes in any situation.

We read in Philippians 4, **6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation...** In all circumstances. If you have a New American Standard Bible, it says “everything.” In everything. Not some things, not a few things, not work it out... In everything, in every situation ... **by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving...** I know we have a lot this season to be frustrated about and a lot of circumstances changing constantly, but we have so much to be thankful for. Let’s list it out. ...**present**

your requests to God. And watch. If you do this... ***7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

Here's what I know about my circumstances. They are often uncontrollable. I bring circumstances on myself, you bring them on yourself, but there are a lot that are uncontrollable. The other thing I've learned is I can't change people. I've also learned I can't explain or understand everything that's going on to me and for all of us. I can't understand it all. But I do know I can have the peace of God in all of it.

What did Jesus say in John 14? ***27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.*** How does the world give? Let's just say some of you have tried to find peace in the stock market. Well, you're probably doing okay this week. But I talked to you when it was at 19,000 and you were thinking about getting another job. We will never find peace in the stock market. You're not going to find peace in a retirement account. I'm not saying you shouldn't have one. I'm not preaching against that. You're not going to find peace in insurance. You should have it. You'd be wise to do that, but it's not going to bring the peace. And I've got to tell you that you are not going to find peace in the government. Not to quote a president, but Ronald Regan once said, "Nine of the most terrifying words in the English language are 'I'm with the government and I'm here to help.'" That's not where we place our trust. We don't take peace as the world gives it to us. ***...Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.***

We looked at it last week – misplaced hope and then where are you turning now to find peace. Because, again, the circumstances you're in, the season of life that you're in, the stage of life that you're in, you're going to leave here today in the same season, the same stage and for most of us, the same circumstances that we've been dealing with, but in the midst of it all, in our peace with God, we can rest in that and experience the peace of God.

I think it's one of the reasons my wife is so giddy when I come out. Because I know she has spent time with the Lord and as she spent time with the Lord, she's ready to go, ready to get the day going. The thing I love about watching my wife and her walk with the Lord is I just never really see... Circumstances hit her like they hit all of us, but there's just a confidence that can come with that. I joke about the business meeting – the business meeting does really happen – but I want to be around that. You want to be around that. You want to be around people that are spurring you on.

That's why you can see someone who has gone through the exact same thing you've gone through, the same exact job loss, the same devastation to a business, the same loss of a family member, the same health care crisis, and you're like *why do you walk around with so much peace and so much joy?* It's because all of us can list everything frustrating going on, but what if we turn it all into prayer, we turn it all into petitions, and we turn it all into thanksgiving? Not accepting the counterfeits that the world wants to throw at us. Not accepting the counterfeits of just change your situation, change your circumstances, and you'll find peace. Some of you have tried that your whole life, but today you need to rest in the fact that the war with God has been ended and Jesus is the reason for that.

So, what does this do for us? When someone is walking in the peace they have with God. Let's look at four very practical ways, things we can do to live this out in our lives.

1. Those at peace with God are called to be peacemakers. Not peacekeepers, but peacemakers, which is more proactive. We read in Matthew 5, Jesus said, 9 ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”*** And what you sow is what you reap. We’re supposed to sow in peace.

James 3 says, 18 ***Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*** That’s what I love about the bumper video. It so well put together by the team. I want to ask you... I know I need to hear this. When you walk into a room, are you sowing peace? When you show up does a calm come into the place? Or when you show up, are you sowing discord? Are you sowing anxiety? When you hear people just all worked up and going at it, do you come in and just stoke that fire or are you one that’s like, “Yeah, let me explain to you. Let’s take this to the Lord. Let’s turn this to a prayer. Let’s turn this to a petition. I’m going to sow in peace and we’re going to reap a harvest of righteousness.”

Now here’s the hard part... This passage has pounded me for years, but the reality is if you are going to be a peacemaker, as a follower of Jesus.

2. Those at peace with God will not always find peace with others no matter how hard they try. You can try and it’s not going to happen with every single person. We read in Romans 12, 18 ***If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*** If it is possible... So, pick up the phone and make the call, make the attempt. When the other person you’re not living at peace with right now picks up and answers, as far as it depends on you, don’t start with how they’ve wronged you, start with your list, owning your stuff, and make every attempt.

Listen, I have tried to excuse this verse away for years. I’ve done the thing where when I’m not at peace with someone, I’ve made one phone call, left a voicemail and I have done my part. No, it’s like if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, you live at peace with everyone.

I have a dear friend in this town that about 13 years ago, we had a major falling out. We were the best of buddies. We were the closest of friends. Something happened in the life of our church and our friendship was over and it was rough. It was passing on the street and no waving. I don’t know if you know this, but Branson is a pretty small town. You’re going to see people a lot. I’m convinced after we had the falling out that I saw him twice as much as normal.

Then we had a decade service here. We were celebrating ten years as a church family. I was just writing down the names of people we wanted to thank in that service and a lot of it was the people who were here on day one and serving. My friend was here day one and serving. I wrote his name down with the Pat Kershaws, the Jon Jenkins, the Gary Smalleys. I wrote his name down and I realized... If it is possible... I’m telling you the conviction that fell on me... If it is possible, Ted, you need to try to work this out. Keep at it. Go at it again. Because I did the *oh, I tried that two years ago and it didn’t work. Lord, I’ve done my part.* How many know what I’m talking about? “Lord, I will convince you of my ways.”

I picked up the phone and I called him. I asked him to meet me for lunch. I’m sorry... It started with an email where I just said, “Thank you, Woodland Hills is where it’s at today because of your hard work and your ministry. If you would be open to it, I would love to go to lunch with you.” I didn’t know what that would mean, but I was rejoicing when the email was returned with, “I’d be happy to meet you.”

I got to the restaurant early, I sat in the booth and it was like a first date. It was really awkward feeling. I was like *I hope he likes what I'm wearing*. You've been there. He walks in... Now this is the tough part. This is the hardest part because we can relive the conflict, we can relive all the issues, so it is possible. Just a lunch alone says this is possible. As far as it depends on you, which means own your part, which means you show up to a meeting like that with a list of everything you've done wrong.

I know for some of you, you're thinking *but I can't come up with such a list; I've done nothing wrong*. Call the church; we'll help you with your list. Get in a home group and we'll help you. That was Gary Smalley's passion. He would love to sit down and write all the things you've done wrong in a situation. He'd be like, "Oh, this is good. Let's keep going. Why stop now?"

Then you show up to that lunch, you show up to that meeting with your list. Not bringing up what was said... That's not the second part of this. It's not about giving your side of it. It's about owning your sin and what you did wrong. I sat down and since I asked for the lunch, I started sharing everything with my friend and he added a lot of things to my list that I wasn't aware of. That's why this is important. I wish I could report that we're the best of buddies; we're not. It's cordial, we wave to each other when we pass each other on the street now. That's a win.

I used to have a mentality in the life of this church for about the first 18 ½ years of this church. Our church is 18 ½ years old. I had the attitude with anybody when conflict would raise its ugly head of "Don't let the door hit you on the way out." If there is anything... I'll just say it: it's Anti-Christ. I know everybody is going to bring up the Paul/Barnabas relationship; I get that. There are differences of how to do ministry and you go your separate ways, but the attitude of "Don't let the door hit you on the way out" is a sinful attitude.

I don't know if you remember two years ago when David Nassar was here speaking. We were having dinner at Liberty a couple of years ago. I said, "David, I'm just shocked. I follow you on social media and you get some of the harshest criticisms, some of the most negative people come at you and just want to tear you down." I said, "David, I then look below the comment and see your comment that says 'Hey, meet me at Panera Bread tomorrow at 9:00 am; I'd like to talk with you about this.'" I'm like, "Do you have security? You should show up with a handler because this guy could hurt you."

The Lord used David in my life. David said, "I had, for the majority of my ministry, the 'don't let the door hit you on the way out. If we can't get along, I'll find other friends; there'll be other people.'" He said, "The Lord convicted me of that." Marty, who is behind this primary camera right here, came to me after the first service and goes, "I got a problem with you! I really don't; I just thought we'd do coffee this week."

Anyway, if it is possible, so far as it depends on you... Look at what the next part says. Live at peace with people who think like you. Live at peace with the republican party. Live at peace with the democratic party. Live at peace with people who vote like you. Live at peace with people who share all of your beliefs. Live at peace with the easy to get along with people and let everyone else just encourage them to not let the door hit them on the way out. If it is possible... That means take the step, make the effort.

As far as it depends on you... Own your part of it. *Live at peace with everyone*, even though it won't be possible with everyone. This is what it means to sow in peace and to reap a harvest of righteousness.

3. Those at peace with God do not cling to others as the source of life. If you know a clingy person, it's because they're looking for you to be the source of their life. They're looking for you to be the one to provide them what only God can bring them. They are leaning into you. As Gary Smalley would always teach us – co-dependency is plugging into people, places, or things as the source of life. And people are not your source of life; He is.

We read in 1 John 4, **16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.** For some of you, to find peace, you have been relying on a job and you find that a job is a great source of income. It's a terrible source of life. Some of you get caught up and it becomes your identity. No, your primary identity is in Christ, first and foremost. Some of you get caught up in looking to family to be your source of life. You look to in-laws, to parents, to your spouse. Some of you are in the season of life where your kids are really succeeding and doing well, so your children become your source of life. But our source of life is Jesus, and we know and rely on the love God has for us. **God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.**

4. Those at peace with God do not sacrifice truth for peace. This is so important. It kind of picks up from what we talked about just a little bit last week in Part 1 of this series on hope. We live in a culture today... I'm just telling you it's creeping into the church and we just want to be ahead of this, we want to be on this as a church. I don't need to sacrifice one ounce of truth to keep the peace. I have friends right now who say, "I haven't changed what I believe, Ted, I'm just not talking about it from the front. I just want to make sure everybody is getting along in the church, so I know there are some hot-button issues and I don't want to address those to keep the peace." We're not called to keep the peace. We're called to be peacemakers. And you do not have to sacrifice one ounce of truth to be a peacemaker.

My absolute favorite quote, outside of scripture, I read this week. Matthew Henry said, "Peace is such a precious jewel that I would give anything for it but truth." You can speak truth. You can stand on truth. You can hold firm on your convictions without sacrificing one ounce of truth. And you can pursue peace as you do this. Remember this: Jesus brought you peace *with* God and he is the one who brings you the peace *of* God.

I have a friend in here right now. You messaged me last night. I appreciate it. You're sharing your heart with me. Your story is not unlike so many other stories in this place that when your head hits the pillow tonight, your mind is going to start racing and you're going to start thinking about the future, you're going to start thinking about maybe some of the ways the world will offer you peace. And you'll start to anchor your hope and your peace and, as we'll look at next week, joy and love in these counterfeits. I want you, at that very moment, as you're struggling in your mental and emotional health... I'm going to call that the thick of battle. In the thick of battle tonight, when your head hits the pillow, remember the war has been won. Rest in that. Go back to that. Get your phone out, pull up iTunes, Gaither Vocal Band. It is finished. The battle is over. It is finished. There'll be no more war. It is finished. The end of the conflict. It is finished. And Jesus is Lord.

To another friend in here right now, you are having a terrible time right now with your spouse. And your mind and your heart are racing daily with strategies to fix it. My prayer for you is that you will be resting in this. It is finished. The battle is over. It is finished. And Jesus is Lord.

Whatever your battle is this week, cry out, prayer, petition, thanksgiving, resting in the peace you have with God so that you, in that very moment, that very situation, whatever it is, can experience the peace of God.

Father, we celebrate the coming of the Lord, the arrival of the Lord this season. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus while we wait for the Second Coming of Christ, we, as a church family, are resting in the battle that was won on Golgotha, the war that was won, what Jesus did for us. For the follower of Jesus who does not have the peace of God today, that they would turn that anxiety, that they would turn their fears, that they would turn their struggles over to prayer, petition, and thanksgiving, so that their hearts and minds will be guarded in Christ Jesus.

To the one that maybe this is the first time they've ever heard the gospel presented and they do not have peace with you, they are alienated from you, they are bringing hostile deeds to you, that today would be the day that their war ends, and they trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior, that they would be justified, declared righteous before you.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.