**Series: An Excellent Harvest**

**Sermon: Peace on Earth**

You’re probably at least superficially familiar with Ted Turner, founder of Turner Broadcast System, CNN, and owner of the Atlanta Braves baseball team. He used to be married to Jane Fonda. He also happens to be very anti-Christian. He ridicules Jesus, proclaims that he has no need for the values and teachings of the Bible, and sneers at the Ten Commandments calling them dangerously archaic.

A couple of years ago he convened a gathering of CNN contributors and said he wanted to see if anybody had a vision for a world of peace and harmony. So he bankrolled a competition to find and publish a book that would present a workable plan for world peace.

He reported, “*Out of 10,000 manuscripts submitted, we did not find one plausible treatise on how to get to a sustainable, peaceful future*.” The he added, “*Without a feasible plan, the prospects of creating peace are grim*.”

I wonder what he would have done if someone submitted a New Testament? Maybe someone did. He probably would have immediately rejected it because he already knows that the Bible is without merit.

If Ted Turner truly wants to find world peace I would encourage him to go to Los Angeles, where he could find the man formerly known as Ron Artest who now coaches the South Bay Lakers of the NBA developmental league, and who changed his legal name in 2011 to Meta World Peace.

That’s as close to world peace as he’ll get for two primary reasons. One is that he lives in a fantasy world. People are sinful by nature so there will always be somebody disrupting things. We will never experience peace by our own efforts. The other reason is that he misunderstands what peace is.

Like many if not most people he thinks peace means “absence of conflict or hostility.” That is the common definition of peace: a state of tranquility; freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions; freedom from conflict between countries.

Absence of conflict or hostility might be possible if people were not human. But we are. We’re selfish. We’re egotistical. We’re set on having our way, and we’ll fight to preserve ourselves and our way of life.

The only way there will ever be world peace and harmony is if people get on board with the maker of peace, the Prince of Peace, the one of whom it was said on His arrival that He came…*to guide our feet into a path of peace* (Luke 1:79) and who elicited a chorus of Angels saying *Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth peace to men on whom His favor rests* (Luke 2:14).

Jesus came bringing peace, however, His presence on Earth means something more than absence of conflict or hostility. Jesus said,

*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother…a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.* Matthew 10:34-36

The Biblical text is not in conflict with itself. He came to seek and save the lost but He couldn’t do it without upsetting some people. He needed to identify sin and call people out which tends to disturb the peace.

Let’s see if we can find a better description and understanding of peace, the third of Fruit of the Spirit. We’ve already looked at Love and joy so now we study peace.

Typically we define peace with the negative – it is of lacking conflict or hostility. I think we can do better if instead we define it with the positive – peace is being aligned with God.

The Old Testament word for peace “shalom” means at its root “well-being”. Shalom is often serves as both a salutation and valediction, like “Aloha”. Shalom can be both a greeting and a “Good-bye” because it means something like, “*I pray that everything is in order for you*” or “*May you experience tranquility*”.

         It wouldn’t make much sense to greet someone with, “*Be absent of war!*”

The New Testament Greek word “ειρηνη” means about the same thing. Like our English word “peace” it is used to mean the opposite of armed conflict, but it also means well-being, wholeness. This is the word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament “shalom”.

Try this: Peace is a sense of well-being because everything is in order with God’s design and plan.

Isaiah wrote, *This is what the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, says: “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river…*Isaiah 48:17f

Notice how peace results from being aligned with God. If they would have obeyed God everything would have been fine. As it was, they were in trouble because they didn’t.

In a passage we usually read around Christmas time Isaiah wrote, *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.* Isaiah 9:6f

God sent Christ to re-establish a sense of order in the world because it was so messed up and disordered by sin. When we’re not aligned with God we don’t have peace. There will always be conflict and hostility. Back to Isaiah 48, *“There is no peace for the wicked.” says the Lord*. (Verse 22) Why no peace? Answer, because they’re out of alignment.

Sometimes our cars and trucks get out of alignment. The wheels aren’t lined up properly. The vehicle can shake and pull to one side or the other. The tires wear unevenly. However, if they’re properly aligned you can drive almost without touching the steering wheel.

There is no peace for the wicked. For the righteous, however, there is peace in the midst of conflict. I’ll show you what I mean. In the early chapters of Acts:

         The Apostles were harassed by the authorities

         Two leading church members died in church

         Conflict arose over how food was distributed from the church pantry

         A leading church Deacon was murdered by a mob

         Saul was tasked with arresting Christians and having them killed

         *The church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.* Acts 9:1

With all that negative they enjoyed a time of peace.

You see, peace doesn’t necessarily mean that there is no conflict or hostility. Peace is a sense of well-being in the midst of conflict because we’re aligned with God through Jesus. That peace comes not because of who we are but because of what He has done.

Jesus said, “*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* John 16:33

Let me illustrate it like this. How do you feel about driving the freeways in a big city? I don’t mind it at all, as long as traffic is moving. Actually I kind of enjoy it.

Do you ever watch NASCAR? Those guys are driving bumper to bumper at 200 MPH. It’s all fine until someone gets out of order. Then it everything goes nuts; tires are screeching and smoking; sheet metal is being crunched or torn lose; cars are flipping upside down. Even at 200 MPH they enjoyed peace as long as everyone was in order.

When everyone on the highway is in order (which happens all the time of course) driving at highway speed can be orderly and stress free, but when just one driver gets out of order it becomes a mess.

The peace that Jesus gives us is a sense of being OK in the midst of troubling circumstances because we know we’re aligned with God. It’s all going to be OK in the end.

So, if Jesus gives us peace in the midst of a troubled world, “What does that peace look like?”, because sometimes I don’t feel like I’m at peace. Consider three dimensions of peace He gives us.

**1.    Spiritual orderliness - Peace with God**

*Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.* Romans 5:1f

Peace with God is orderliness in relation to God. It’s not that we’re without sin but that He has paid for our sins and forgiven us so that we are considered sinless in God’s eyes.

God’s plan from the beginning was that we would do things His way; obey His commands; live and love like He lives and loves. That was His order. Sin entered the world creating dis-order. Dis-order results in dis-ease: anxiety, anger, hatred, discord, conflict, hostility.

By believing and accepting Jesus as Savior we are considered righteous. We are re-aligned, in orderly step with God.

**2.    Psychological orderliness - Peace of God**

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Philippians 4:4-7

The peace of God will afford a sense of orderliness and tranquility and like a sentry will guard our hearts and minds.

Life is still filled with harsh realities, we call it “the real world”, but we don’t have to be messed up by it. We can go about life pursuing our purpose in Christ.

If we have peace with God we can cast all of our anxieties on Him and live in the peace of God, psychological orderliness knowing that nothing is beyond His reach.

In days long ago a woman was walking along a road carrying a large and seemingly heavy package. A man driving a carriage pulled by a single horse stopped and offered her a ride. She gladly accepted so he helped her into the carriage but she insisted on keeping the package on her lap.

         “*There is room in the back*,” he said, “*you can rest your package there*.”

         “*Oh no*”, she replied, “*I don’t want to put that much weight on the horse*.”

If we have the peace with God we can enjoy the peace of God but we have to let go of the things that trouble us. Turn them over to Him and go about living as a Jesus follower.

A third dimension of the peace Jesus gives is…

3. **Relational orderliness - Peace on Earth**

When there is not peace on earth it’s because the earth is filled with people who are looking out for ourselves first; doing our own thing; selfishly chasing our own desires; insisting on our rights; trying to be the center of the universe.

Do they still have bumper cars at the county fair? The object of that ride is to smash into other cars, knocking them around. Imagine if everybody decided to drive carefully around, all in the same direction, staying in a neat line. It wouldn’t be much fun, but it would be orderly.

The earth would be an orderly place if we all followed God’s will and plan. That’s what Jesus came to restore. It probably won’t happen in His first go around because Satan, the prince of this world is active, but when Jesus comes back He will destroy the evil that disrupts order and put everything in line with God.

If we have peace with God and enjoy the peace of God we can experience peace on Earth. We can see it in our marriages; in our families; at work; in our friendships; in our churches.

         Instead of conflict we can enjoy unity.

         Instead of hostility we can experience true friendship.

         Instead of holding grudges we can offer forgiveness.

         Instead of insisting on our rights we can selflessly serve the people in our lives.

         Instead of carrying anger against someone who has hurt us we can seek to win that person to Christ.

         Instead of seeing a world of conflict we’d like to escape we can see a lost world in need of a Savior.

It was a few days before Christmas several years ago when a Chicago Tribune reporter who considered himself an atheist, had written an article about the Delgado family. There was the grandmother Perfecta, a 13 year old granddaughter Jenny, and her sister Lydia 11 years old.

They lived on the west side of Chicago in a 2 room apartment with bare walls, no furniture, no rugs … nothing but a kitchen table and a handful of rice in the cupboards. The girls each owned one short-sleeved dress plus they shared a thin gray sweater. On cold days when the girls walked to school, one of the girls would start with the sweater and then give it to the other after a while. It was all they had.

Perfecta wanted more for her granddaughters and would gladly have worked but severe arthritis and age made work too difficult and painful. The article detailed their poverty in stark and powerful ways.

A few days after he wrote his article, on Christmas Eve he visited the Delgado’s again. His article had touched the hearts of many subscribers who responded with furniture and appliances, rugs, dozens of coats, scarves and gloves. This was long before “Go Fund Me”.

         The girls would no longer have to share a sweater.

         There were cartons and bags and boxes of food everywhere. They had so much food that the cupboards and closets couldn’t contain it.

         Someone had donated a Christmas tree, and under it were mounds of presents and thousands of dollars in cash!

The reporter was astonished! What really got to him was what he found Perfecta and her granddaughters doing. They were preparing to give most of it away. "*Why would you give so much of this away?*" he asked.

Perfecta responded, "*Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do*."

Then he asked Perfecta what she thought about the generosity that was shown to them.

She said, "*This is wonderful. We did nothing to deserve this; it’s all a gift from God. But it is not His greatest gift. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. Jesus*."

He didn’t know what to say. As he drove back to the office he began to reflect on a few things:

         1st - He had plenty. But along with that… he had lots of anxiety. By contrast, the Delgado’s - despite their poverty – were at peace.

         2nd - He had everything and yet wanted more. The Delgado’s had nothing and yet were generous.

         3rd - Even though he had so much more than the Delgado’s, he longed for what they had.

By the way, the journalist and self-proclaimed atheist was Lee Strobel, now a Christian speaker and author of the books: The Case for Faith; The Case for Christ; The Case for a Creator; and several others. He is also a consultant on the Room for Doubt program we’re studying in one of our Sunday school classes.

How could Perfecta, Jenny, and Lydia enjoy peace on Earth in the midst of their dire circumstances?

**First,** the Delgado’s knew that no matter what their circumstances, God was there for them. In Jesus He was as declared, Immanuel, GOD WITH US!

God stepped out of heaven in order to be there with us and for us. At least eight times He reiterated the promise: “*I’ll never leave you nor forsake you*”. That’s where we get peace. Peace comes from the fact that we don’t have to face this life alone. Because of Jesus we are aligned with God and He’ll take care of us.

**Second**, the Delgado’s knew that Jesus held the future.

Allow me to use again a verse I read earlier, but his time in context. Jesus said, *I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.*

*But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.* John 16:28, 32f

How would what Jesus told them bring peace? Because by telling them He was declaring that He knew His future and He knew their future. Our peace lies in Jesus knowing what is ahead, and knowing He holds tomorrow.

The Delgado’s weren’t worried about giving away what they’d received. The only thing that concerned them was “*This is what Jesus would want us to do*”. They were aligned with God and believed God would take care of them.

**Third**, the Delgado’s had peace because they believed in a God who could do things.

“*We did nothing to deserve this; it’s all a gift from God*.” They believed in a God who did things for them.

How can we know that kind of peace? Is it the work of the Holy Spirit producing fruit in us, or is it the result of our effort at growing into Christ-likeness? Yes

The Holy Spirit does cultivate fruit in us. And we do work toward developing that fruit in ourselves. It’s not either/or. It’s both/and.

Maybe someone here today feels out of sorts; you’re experiencing dis-order and dis-ease. Maybe you’re a believer but you just aren’t feeling it right now.

Great! That means that the Holy Spirit has taken the initiative to convict you. (That is part of His job by the way.)

Maybe it’s time for you to act. It’s time for you to fully align yourself with God.

It’s time for you to come to faith and repentance. Ask God to forgive and restore you. Ask God to give you His peace so you can enjoy the peace of God. When you really know the peace of God you can also experience peace on Earth, just like the Delgado’s.