

## The Pursuit

It is pretty safe to say that the whole world is looking for something — they often don't know what they are looking for — but they are looking for something. Regardless of what they have or who they are they are continually searching for something — they could be looking for more money... looking for more thrills... looking for more satisfaction... looking for more contentment.

Consider this current political season. What is the big cry – change. People are looking for something different. And what will happen if they get that change? Nothing — and a few years down the line they will be crying for change again. And the same thing will happen a few years after that.

I recently read a quote that said: “If politics can change anything, then Christianity is a lie.” Think about that for a moment.

This same question of who is look for something can be asked of those who play the lottery and do not win... those who seek thrills in drugs, but are unsatisfied... those who seek happiness in illicit or multiple sexual relationships... those who seek fulfillment by working and working and working, never achieving what they think they want. What do they do??

What will they do to fill the craving that is in their hearts... their souls? And for us, as Christians, aren't we sometimes the same way — counting on something that doesn't come to pass and we are frustrated... we are sad... we are not content or satisfied with where we are at? What do we do... where do we turn?

Our Savior, in our Gospel lesson this morning addresses this — and gives us the answer to where true contentment... true peace comes from. Turn with me to John 16. It is the last night of our Savior's earthly life... he has already instituted the Lord's Supper... he has identified his betrayer... and he is now in the Garden of Gethsemane giving his disciples some final instructions before he leaves them and he says - 16:31-33 (READ).

Jesus has already told them that he will die... that he will leave. His disciples have finally believed him. Now he tells them about the beginning of the trouble that they will be going through — *Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone.* What an encouraging statement — *that you will be scattered.*

We know that following the crucifixion they all hid for their lives. But I do not believe that this is not what Jesus is referring to here — I believe that he is referring to the fact that under intense persecution following his ascension and the beginning of what we know as the Christian Church — that they were all scattered. It was this scattering that led to the spread of Christianity throughout the known world.

Now, you might think that because of this there would be problems... there would be unhappiness — but, consider what Jesus then says: 16:33 *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*

Those with a psychological bent might think that there is something wrong... something that doesn't add up. The very thing that you would think that would not lead to peace — Jesus says that it does. *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.*

Jesus has told them many things during the three years that he was with them. Most things they did not understand — some things they did. Read the Gospel accounts and you will see this. Here Jesus is saying that I'm going to go away... you will be scattered... — but you will have peace, and oh yeah, by the way you — will have tribulation — but be of good cheer because I have overcome the world.

Think about those words — they are not exactly sure what is happening... at this point it is late at night, or wee hours of the morning. As I said, they've just celebrated the Last Supper — and now they are in the garden. They have to sense that things are about to come to a head... to a climax. But in it all Jesus said — even if I go away... even if you are scattered — you will have peace.... *you will have peace.*

Now, what kind of peace is Jesus talking about? Certainly not the peace between nations — that can be broken at any moment... or the peace between individuals that also can be broken at any moment... or the peace between the leaders of the government... or even the religious leaders. What kind of peace is he talking about?

We think of one of the names of Jesus — from Isaiah 9:6: *“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* — the *Prince of Peace.*

This is one of the names that the Prophet Isaiah gives to Jesus — but what does it mean — what does it mean, especially in light of the fact that it certainly does not mean an earthly type of peace?

We have to go back to the fact that because of sin — Adam's sin — mankind — all of us do not have peace with God. Adam represented all his posterity. Because of Adam's sin we are all open to the wrath and curse of God — and therefore we are not at peace with God. On the contrary we are at war with God. But in Christ we have peace with God.

In a number of places we find this defined for us in the Scriptures. In Romans 5:1 we read: *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul has made clear the status of man without God — He says things like: *“There is none righteous, no, not one...”* & *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”* & then, after saying *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...* he says that we are enemies with God. We see clearly — we are at war with God... separated from God... but now through Jesus Christ — we can have peace with God — we are at peace with God.

We find this same theme in the book of Ephesians. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter he again describes what we are without Christ and with Christ. And then he says: 2:14-17: *“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.”*

Again we see the fact that those without Christ are at war with God — they are at enmity with God. But because of faith in Christ — there is now peace — *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... For He Himself is our peace... thus making peace... And He came and preached peace.*

This is the peace that we, as Christians have... it is a peace that comes from within — regardless of our external circumstances... it is a peace that doesn't matter who we are... how much we have or don't have... it is a peace that is not conditioned on things that we have no control over. This is why the glorious gospel is called the "*the Gospel of peace.*"

We all know that our outward circumstances can change. What we do know about tomorrow is that we don't know what tomorrow will bring. In fact, tomorrow or the next day could bring some very distressing or disturbing things. And to this we should not be surprised.

But even though we have this inward peace there is something that we might not have — in fact we are guaranteed what we will not have — and that is outward peace. Jesus clearly said: "*In the world you will have tribulation;*" — not exactly an encouraging thought — not the type of statement used to build a consensus: "*In the world you will have tribulation;*" This is something that the Christian can look forward to.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to Timothy says this: 3:12 "*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" You see, when we become Christians, while we are at peace with God — we then come into conflict with the world — specifically the non-Christian world. We come into conflict with it's values... with the things that accepts... with the things that it rejects.

When one becomes a Christian, while one has salvation with all of it's blessings, this could be the beginning of a number of other problems — because Jesus said: "*In the world you will have tribulation;*" But, he also said something else — he just didn't leave it there — *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.* ... *I have overcome the world.*

What did Jesus mean when he said this? He meant — in part — that all that the world could throw at him — the insults, the ridicule — and finally the cross — he overcame it.

As he said these words — not yet having gone to the cross — he knew the end of the story... he knew that following his death — there would be the resurrection — which signified God's acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world — but it also indicated our Saviors victory over sin — *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*"

What does all this mean for us? We first need to ask where do we look for peace? Where do we look for contentment... for happiness? Do we look for things that are external... or things that are temporary? Do we look to politics... do we look at the at the local sports teams... do we look at any variety of things that we mentioned a few minutes ago???

Or do we look at a true relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ? All around us people are looking at a variety of areas in order to find peace. And no matter how hard they try... what means they use — they will not achieve it — because there is only one way to peace with God.

For those who have trusted in Christ as Savior — there is peace — regardless of circumstances — because Jesus has overcome — he has achieved victory for us. Will it be easy?? No — and in many respects it might be even harder than before knowing Christ.

In one of the most powerful passages of Scripture the Apostle Paul puts it this way — in Romans 8:31-39

*“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

If we have this — salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ — then we have peace — despite the tribulation that might come our way... despite difficult circumstances... despite the political climate. Because our real peace... our real contentment comes from within. Let us praise God that we know him through the Lord Jesus Christ... and if you don't know Christ as Savior — then trust in him today... for the peace that only comes from knowing him by faith... for the peace that passes understanding...