

JESUS GIVES PEACE IN A WORLD OF PANIC

Sermon based on John 14:27

Pastor Jason J. Thiel

80 years ago, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi war machine were chewing up nations like a kid eating up all the quarantine snacks. And in 1939 he started to get hungry for England. Just imagine the mindset of the everyday British citizen in that kind of an atmosphere. Every boat on the horizon made them wonder. Every plane overhead stirred a little panic. Every loud noise sent them running for cover. In fear and confusion they were just waiting for the bombs to drop. How could the British government reverse the confusion and instill confidence? How could the British government calm people's fears and maintain order? Here's how (picture). The British ministry of information prepared these propaganda posters for the imminent German attack. And as soon as the bombs started falling they were supposed to flood England with them. In spite of everything going on around them, the only way they had a possibility of getting through everything and winning the victory was to keep calm and carry on.

The Nazi war machine is a chapter in history textbooks now. But that doesn't mean churning emotions of fear and confusion are. We know that all too well right now. Every time we check our social media feed we wonder... tallies of those infected and rumors of mass shutdown floating overhead stirring panic... loud warnings that we would just rather run away from. It's very real right now. So as we look to our Lord and his Word this morning what can he do to calm us, comfort us, and instill peace in our hearts? Here's how; from the heavenly ministry of information we receive this message: Keep calm and *Jesus* on! Today we'll explore this question: How can Jesus give us peace in a world of panic?

It doesn't matter if it's a big visible force like a national army, or an invisible force like a microscopic virus, they both do the same things: They tear apart our world as we know it... They put everything we treasure in a state of turmoil... They put everything we live for in a state confusion. That really is the atmosphere of this portion of John's Gospel... at least as we view it from the perspective of Jesus' disciples. The disciples' whole world was a carpenter from Nazareth who said things and did things in ways that were beyond any human being. And I don't say that figuratively. Remember, these men left everything they previously knew to make a new life with Jesus. And they didn't have a single regret. With Jesus their life had relationships, meaning, and excitement. There was even a building sense of glory as crowds around them grew. Yes, Jesus was their world. They treasured their new life. It was everything they lived for.

But then all of a sudden, seemingly from out of nowhere, a bombshell was dropped in the middle of that world. Jesus himself told them, "**My children, I will be with you only a little longer.**" Imagine their reaction. Woah! What do you mean, Jesus? How could you leave us, Jesus? Part of the fear and confusion was very understandable. That's because they loved Jesus. They remembered that Jesus had talked about his leaving including suffering, pain, and death. And they didn't want that to happen to the one they loved. But in a way, their reaction was also quite revealing. There was also a part of them that was sad they'd be losing all the things that Jesus was providing them. Without Jesus there went there went everything they had grown comfortable with! There went their excitement! There went all those thoughts of glory. They were focused on their happiness in the here and now. So when the here and now got turned upside down, those men whose hearts appeared to be so anchored were so suddenly tossed around like a boat on the sea. It seems that they were okay with Jesus as their Lord who provided, but they let other things become their savior to comfort them and bring peace to their lives. And it's no wonder why peace went away when all those other things were gone.

Maybe everything that is going on in our world and in our lives is a good opportunity to examine our own hearts? What do our reactions reveal? There's no doubt everything's changed and disrupted. We're wondering what all this means. There's fear and confusion. And much of that is very understandable. God created us with real feelings and emotions and needs to be met. And the pain is real when any of those are affected.

But make an honest examination. Is some of it also a bit like the disciples' reaction? It's easy to see Jesus as Lord of our lives and thank him when we feel we have plenty of food and toilet paper. It's easy to see Jesus as Lord of our lives and thank him when finances are good... when we're healthy and our loved ones are healthy. It's easy to see Jesus as Lord of our lives and thank him when daily routines are going and when life is manageable and comfortable. I know I sure said a lot of "Thank you, Lord's" when I finally got all of this technology and live stream all set up and working! But what happens when at a time like this... when plenty turns to scarcity... when finances take a hit... when health is in jeopardy and loved ones are in danger? What happens when things are uncomfortable and outside of our control? If those are the things we treasure most, then it's no wonder then why we panic and stress. If those are the things we live for, it's no wonder why we feel like our whole world is turned upside down! Have those things slowly taken Jesus' place as our Savior?

Think of it this way. When I used to put my precious two-year-old to bed at night, what do you think happened if we couldn't find her "blanky"? She'd cry and scream! She completely panicked because she thought that "blanky" was the source of her peace and security. She was a smart little girl, but she couldn't see how foolish that thinking was. Are we starting to see how foolish some of our panic can be?

That's what makes Jesus' words so powerful today. These words were spoken on the night he was handed over to death. That means that before the disciples ever witnessed the suffering, pain, and death... before the disciples ever panicked and denied and abandoned Jesus... before you and I ever experienced the uncertainty and fear of what we're experiencing this very minute in our country.... Jesus spoke these words of promise. He spoke them precisely for times like those/these. **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."**¹

Peace. And not peace like, "I hope this can all be over soon." Or peace like, "I just want things to be 'normal' again." That's the world's promise of peace that comes and goes. This is Jesus' peace. And Jesus' peace truly is a different kind of peace. Jesus' peace doesn't depend on the president or a political party we favor. Jesus' peace doesn't on how the media covers it. Jesus' peace isn't as fragile as a skittish economy. His peace doesn't crumble under pressure. And he proved it. The very night he spoke these words he was violently arrested, went through a sham of a trial, suffered extreme torture, and was crucified and died a bloody death. All of that upheaval would have undone anyone else's' words. It would have rendered them empty and useless. But not Jesus! It's just the opposite! Those events only solidified his peace. The crown of thorns and the blood stained cross secured the peace that Jesus brings because it paid for the world's sins. And it paid for yours and mine... even those sins of making other things the source of our peace. You are at peace with God himself. By faith you have a relationship with him that brings meaning and joy and hope. You have God by your side and in your heart at every second, through every twist and turn of this crazy world. That's Jesus' peace. That's your peace. I saw a meme that said it well... God has decided not to follow the stay at home order. He will continue to be present everywhere.

That really does change everything... even... no, especially right now! The headline may read *Cases of COVID-19 are on the rise*. But we Christians read, **"For I am convinced that neither death nor life... neither the present nor the future, nor any powers... will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."**² The headline may read *US Headed for Recession*. But we Christians read, **"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances... whether living in plenty or in want... My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."**³ Or never mind the headlines in the news; maybe the headlines in your heart are screaming, "I'm afraid! I'm afraid for my health! I'm afraid for my job and finances! I'm worried about my family and loved ones! I'm uncertain about my future!" But over our own panicked scream we Christians hear the calming voice of Jesus saying to each one of us personally, **"Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. My peace I give you."**⁴

I'm not downplaying any suffering, stress, pain, or turmoil you may be going through. And neither is Jesus. Because oftentimes life in this world does feel like an uneasy atmosphere of wartime... with things on the horizon making us wonder... issues constantly floating overhead stirring panic... loud problems that we just want to run away from. But in the middle of all of that stand Jesus' words of pure comfort today. **"Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. My peace I give you."**⁵ When things get turned upside down in this life, we'll be okay because we're focused on Jesus' love for us. When things in this life are ripped from our hands, we'll be ok because our grip is on the eternal blessings of heaven. We don't have to be so troubled about the present because Jesus has given us a promise for all of eternity! Focus on him. Focus on what he has accomplished for you... what he promises you... the world he has in store for you. Keep calm and Jesus on! It's Jesus who gives peace in a world of panic. Amen.

¹ John 14:27

² Romans 8:38-39

³ Philippians 4:11, 19

⁴ John 14:27

⁵ John 14:27