

“A Peace of the Action”

James 3:13-4:3

Series: Believe Chapter 23 Peace

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When a couple got married, the wife put a small shoebox on a top shelf in the closet and asked her husband never to look inside it and never to ask questions about its contents. For 60 years the man honored his wife's request. In fact, he forgot about the box until the day when his wife grew gravely ill. So the man, putting his wife's affairs in order, found the shoebox in her closet and brought it to her at the hospital. He asked her if now he might be able to open it. She agreed. They opened the box, and inside were two crocheted dolls and a roll of money that totaled \$95,000. The man was astonished.

Before their wedding, the wife explained, her grandmother gave her this advice. If she and her husband ever get into an argument, they should work hard to reconcile, and if they were unable to reconcile, she should simply keep the peace by keeping her mouth shut and crocheting a doll. The man was touched by this. There were only two crocheted dolls in the box. In over 60 years of marriage, there were only two conversations they were unable to reconcile. Tears came to his eyes, and he grew even more deeply in love with her. Then holding up the roll of money he asked, "What's this?" His wife said, "Well, every time I crocheted a doll, I sold it to a local craft fair for five dollars."

It's hard to keep the peace. Regardless of our race, creed, gender or nationality we all desire peace. We pray for a world at peace. Heads of state claim they are working for peace. Even those fighting on the front lines on both sides will say they are waging war to achieve peace. It's on everyone's mind. Yet peace is the one quality most say is missing from their lives.

It begins when we are young. A Sunday school teacher discusses the Ten Commandments with her class of five and six-year-olds. After explaining the commandment to honor thy father and thy mother, she asks, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?" Without missing a beat, one little boy answers, "Thou shall not kill."¹

This week's chapter in Believe is on Peace. Our key idea is "I am free from anxiety because I have found peace with God, peace with others, and peace with myself." Our key question is "Where do I find strength to battle anxiety and fear?" That's based on our key verse:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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 4:6-7)

¹ Bill White, Paramount, California.

According to Kindle, this is one of the most underlined sentences in all books. That little fact tells me many are trying to find peace in their marriage, in their family, with their friends, coworkers, church members, neighbors and community. How can we find peace? We need to get “A Peace of the Action.” Peace requires action. Here’s the first one:

Make Peace with God. Paul writes,

Therefore, 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 5:1-2

You may not realize this but at one time there was open warfare between us and God. It was not God’s wish or will. We are the ones who started it and keep it going. Every sin down through the ages is an act of rebellion and rejection of God’s rule. This created a great misunderstanding. Over time we came to view his just opposition to our sin as His anger against us. We see Him as a grouchy old man who is out to get us.

Did you have a grouchy next-door neighbor? You know – the kind who told you to stay off his lawn and wouldn’t give your ball back when it went over the fence? Over time you probably exaggerated his wrath and called him “Mean old Mr. Caruthers.” It reminds me of “Old Man” Marley in the movie *Home Alone*. Kevin McCallister is home alone and scared of his neighbor who is rumored to have murdered his family with a snow shovel in 1958. Later, Kevin meets Old Man Marley and discovers the rumors are false. He is actually gentle and kind. In fact, Mr. Marley is the one who eventually saves Kevin from the real threats and thieves. Where do Kevin and Mr. Marley meet? Where is the real Mr. Marley revealed? In church on Christmas Eve – the celebration of the birth of the Prince of Peace.

God is not a grouchy next door neighbor. Through the birth of the Prince of Peace, through His death and resurrection we discover a God who is gentle, kind and gracious, a God who will go to any lengths to save us from the real threats and thieves – our sin and selfish. Through Jesus Christ we have peace with God. We have access to the highest authority not because we won the war. It comes purely by God’s kindness, His forgiveness, His grace. So what action do we take? Surrender. That’s what you do when you lose a war. You surrender. In every other war, the one who surrenders is beaten, humiliated, sometimes enslaved, too often killed. Not in this war. When you surrender you are invited into the very family of God. You become a child of the King. And God’s peace doesn’t just live between you. It actually lives in you. All you need to do is believe it and embrace it. Let God’s peace settle down in your heart.

When you do, the next step is to **Make Peace with Yourself**. In another passage Paul writes,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19)

You don't need a degree in psychology to recognize that people often war with one another when they are at war within themselves. Many I meet do not like themselves – who they are, how they look, what they've done.

Recently I upgraded our master bathroom. I replaced the mirror. I also improved the lights. I went from a very dim 120 watts to a whopping 300 watts. Now I can see with frightening clarity every sag and bag, every crevice and canyon in my face. I wasn't too pleased with my appearance before. Now, every morning when I stumble into the bathroom with the grace of a pregnant hippopotamus and turn on those blinding lights I feel like I am viewing a horror movie. My only conclusion: the new mirror is broken. It only shows old people.

When you look in the mirror: do you like what you see? Do you find it hard to love what you see below the surface? Are you occasionally, or even frequently, at war with yourself? That's not God's will for you. If you are in Christ, if the peace of God dwells in you, you are a new creation. The old is gone. God views you with unconditional love. He sees you surrounded by the purity of Christ. God is not in denial. He's not fooling Himself. He knows there's still major work to do. But you are perfect in His eyes...and His light is a whole lot brighter than 300 watts. If he feels that way about you, then you can start loving you. Will you look in the mirror and love God's new creation? Will you forgive yourself? Will you make peace with yourself? It's difficult to live in peace with others if there's a war going on within.

Moving outward, our next step is to **Make Peace with Others**. James, the brother of Jesus, says if I want to live in peace with others I must first search my own heart and discover what's hiding in there. He writes

If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice (James 3:14-16).

In the midst of a conflict, we expect the other person to change, come to their senses and ask (or beg) for our forgiveness. We know exactly what they did wrong and what they should do to make it right. Unfortunately the other person thinks the same. The result is a stalemate or the silent treatment – which is no treat at all.

James tells us it's not wise to expect the other person to make the first move. He mentions two deadly diseases which kill peace. The first is "bitter envy." The word 'bitter' refers to poisoned or polluted water. 'Envy' is the Greek word zelos from which we get our word "zealous" and "zealot" which means someone who is extreme or out of control. Do you see the picture? Bitterness, left unchecked, is a pollution which takes over your heart and turns it into a toxic waste superfund site. The one most often hurt by it is you. Someone told me once "Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die."

The other dangerous infection is “selfish ambition.” Originally this word referred to selfish politicians who use corruption to get into office. Not a pretty picture. This passage describes any selfishness that causes rivalry and arguments.

While shopping for a new car a battle royal erupted between a husband and wife. He wanted a new truck. She wanted a fast sports car. The discussion grew very heated until the wife stated, "Look, I want something that goes from 0 to 180 in four seconds or less, and that's all there is to it! My birthday is coming up and you better surprise me or else!" When her big day came, the wife went out to the garage, but there was nothing that goes 0 to 180 in four seconds or less. Angry, she went back into the house looking for her husband, but he was not home. Frustrated and upset, she went into the bathroom to get ready—there, sitting on the floor and wrapped in a red ribbon, was a brand new scale!

Funeral Services are pending.²

Do you want to keep the peace or do you want to keep all the pieces – all the bitter, hurtful, resentful feelings and arguments that fuel the conflict? The starting point for peace is in you. Search your heart. Do you argue in your head against a rival? Do you imagine yourself presenting your case, justifying your thoughts and actions, and always winning the argument? Is there any evidence of bitterness, jealousy, envy or selfishness? James says if you find these deadly poisons don't declare them or deny them. Delete them.

Do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice (James 3:14-16).

I cannot control how other people think or act. I can work on my own feelings. Where was I wrong? What did I do to cause this stand off? Why did I react so strongly in this situation? Once I identify these poisons, I can turn to God and ask Him for the antidote.

Finally: **Make Peace Now.** Start today. Peace requires action. It needs to start with someone. Let it start with you. Picking up where James left off, the Apostle John teaches it is not enough to talk peace. We need to live it.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth (I John 3:16-18).

John gives us the greatest example of love from the greatest Peacemaker: our Lord Jesus. By His definition, love is an action that requires sacrifice. The Cross is the ultimate act of love – Jesus sacrificed Himself for us who sinned against Him. Few of us will be required

² Peg Beukema.

to make peace at the price of our lives. But John suggests there is something we all can do to make peace: share what we have with those in need.

As the old song says, “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” Let’s start by declaring a truce on Facebook. Resist the temptation to give people a piece of your mind and instead get a Peace of the Action. Let’s practice peace through our actions. Let it begin by recognizing where we are wrong. Let it begin by taking the first step to restore a strained relationship. Let it begin by making amends with your spouse, parent, sibling, child or coworker. Let it begin by listening and understanding first instead of arguing your case. Let it begin by making an extra effort to welcome a newcomer to Woodside. Let it begin by working with the Prison and Recovery Ministry, Habitat for Humanity, Code Blue, the Dinner Ministry, Grief Share, Manor Care and the Church Has Left the Building. Let it begin by signing up for a future Mission trip. Let it begin by offering the love of Jesus in a practical way to the friendless, the homeless and the hopeless.

Max Lucado tells the story of pastor friend named Buckner Fanning who served for 42 years as the pastor of Trinity Baptist church in San Antonio. His whole life, Buckner was determined to live a life of peace. He had good reason.

When he was 21 years old, Buckner was a marine stationed in Hiroshima, Japan in the aftermath of the atomic bomb. Imagine what it was like to patrol the streets of Hiroshima in an American uniform. Picture the annihilation, the acres of rubble, the shadow of death. Tension and hostility greet you with every glare.

Walking the streets one day Buckner spied a wooden sign half hanging from the chain written in Japanese and English. It said “Methodist Church” and there was an arrow pointing the way. Next Sunday morning this 21 year old marine climbed out of bed, put on his uniform, grabbed his Bible and walked through the rubble to the place where the sign pointed: a small church building, one wall completely collapsed, the roof had a hole in it. Yet still inside there were fifteen or twenty Christians gathered to worship. If you were a Japanese member of that Methodist Church how would you feel to look up and see this American soldier walk into your church? How would you respond?

Buckner said, “I stood at the entrance and I waited and for a long time the people looked at me and no one spoke. Finally one of them did. A man looked up at me and said the one word I understood in Japanese: ‘Brother.’” The man walked across the dirty floor, extended his hand to Buckner and led him to a seat. Buckner didn’t understand any Japanese but he followed along in his Bible.

Then at the end of the sermon they took out the bread and the cup to celebrate communion. Once again a Japanese Christian looked at this American Christian, walked across the room with the bread and the cup and presented communion to his brother.

In that moment there were no Japanese and American people, in the sacredness of that moment there was no war, there was no conflict. There was peace. Peace.

Why? Because they had negotiated a settlement? Because they reached a peace accord? No. There was peace because two men had made peace with God through Jesus Christ, made peace with themselves because of Jesus Christ and because they had made peace with God there was an opportunity to make peace with others. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be sons of God."³

Is there anyone in your life with whom you need to make peace? Take time to answer that question. Is there anyone with whom you need to bring down a wall and build a bridge? James the brother of Jesus said this:

Those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness (James 3:18)

Would you sow a seed of peace? Would you extend a handshake to a neighbor? Would you choose not to gossip about a coworker? Would you give somebody the benefit of the doubt? Would you reserve judgment until you've heard someone else's side of the story? Would you resist the temptation to label someone according to the color of their skin or gender or political preference? Would you become an ambassador for peace? Our world needs peacemakers. Jesus the Prince of Peace has taken up residence in you and me. May we be people of peace because He has made peace with us. Amen.

³ <http://media.oakhillschurch.com/default.aspx?page=3679&item=511>

