

The Human Search for Peace

Study One



Jesus and the Rich Young Man, Anon, c1879

A starter

How would you define 'peace' based on your own experience?

Key verse

'In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.' (Psalm 4:8)

The search for 'something'

(Read Matthew 19:16-22; Luke 12:16-21; Job 21:7-14)

For some, the search for peace, contentment, or well-being, involves the possession of a measure of wealth that can enable them to better enjoy the 'pleasures' of life, and though that might simply mean consideration of future comforts, it can become a distraction to the growth of faith, as the wealthy young man questioning Jesus in Matthew's story finds out.

Here is someone on a journey of faith, assuming that there was one good thing required beyond the demands of the law that would ensure his salvation and give him peace of mind. Many Jews believed this to be true.

Jesus challenges this understanding of goodness, even after the man's assertion that he keeps the laws. 'What do I still lack?' he asks. Jesus points

to wealth and possessions, but the emphasis is on humbly following him, and discovering in this way the answer to his question.

Luke adds to this train of thought with a rather uncomfortable message for many, that focussing on possessions and investment so we might look forward to 'taking life easy' later in life is possibly not the correct focus along our journey of faith.

Job adds to this debate a rather contemporary picture of a broken world where the wicked, the powerful, and those who see no need of God in their self-made lives, ignoring the needs of others, seem to prosper, enjoy the riches of this life, and 'go down to the grave in peace'.

Discussion

- 1: In what ways can 'life' get in the way of our personal well-being, and impact on faith?
 - 2: Is the question asked by the rich young man, 'What do I still lack?' one that still troubles us today?
 - 3: In the search for peace in life, is there a point at which having just enough becomes having too much, and where does a balance lie?
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More Urgent in Times of Need

(Read Exodus 2:23-25; Luke 7:36-39, 44-50; Luke 8:40-50)

When we are struggling with daily life, to where or what do we look to find relief? For many today, sadly, it can mean a downward spiral into alcohol or drugs unless they can access the help they require.

The Israelites were suffering badly in Egypt during their long years in slavery, reflected in the story from Exodus 2. However, their cries for help did not go unnoticed, as God heard, and remembered his covenant with them. Release, and relief, would follow as Moses received his call to be the means through which this people would find freedom from their misery and begin a journey 'into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey' (Exodus 3:8).

The Bible tells us that there's more to life than possessions, demonstrated in the story of a woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears in Luke 7, whilst he's eating in the house of a Pharisee.

We're told that it was the burden of sin that was weighing her down, but the expression of love shown in her flowing tears and the act of anointing speak powerfully of someone who has found, in Jesus, something she so desperately needed. Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.' (v 50)

Luke 8 brings us two people very much searching for peace, a synagogue leader with a dying child, and a woman weak with monthly blood loss and desperate enough to ignore her embarrassment and the ritual of isolation to touch Jesus' cloak. Jesus' response to her is brief but says so much, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.' The synagogue leader, Jairus, who had waited patiently whilst Jesus dealt with the woman's needs only to be told that his daughter had died, is told not to be afraid, but to believe, and she will live.



Peter Paul Rubens, Feast of Simon the Pharisee, c.1619

Discussion

- 4: When times are bad, how easy is it to blame ourselves or God, rather than to do what the Israelites did in Egypt and cry out to God for help?
 - 5: A chance meeting over a meal led to a woman finding the inner peace she lacked in her response to Jesus. How important might it have been to grasp the moment, rather than thinking she might catch up with Jesus in a less public place, and is that something we can be guilty of?
 - 6: Thinking of the story in Luke 8, how much courage can it take to open our hearts to God for our own healing of mind and body? The woman fell trembling at the feet of Jesus after receiving healing. Jairus was simply told to believe. Put yourself in their place and how would you feel?
 - 7: Twice we have seen Jesus' response, 'Go in peace...'. Is that a feeling you have experienced and can describe?
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Possible pitfalls

(Read Amos 6:1-7; Hosea 10:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3)

One danger that an affluent nation faces is that of complacency, the sense of security that comes with living with a degree of financial independence, even if only a small percentage of the population are classed as extremely wealthy. A quick search online brings up several cases of complacency being responsible for wars, epidemics, and financial crises, all of which affect our personal peace and well-being, and that of entire nations.

There's an element of sarcasm in Amos' words to the self-satisfied rich, enjoying an opulent lifestyle based upon an assumption that the nation's power and security made it safe from the 'evil day' that Amos talked about. Yet they were all too willing to keep the poor miserable. Amos condemns their attitude, warning that this self-made peace and security is about to be shattered.

Hosea has spent some time talking about Israel's sin, and the punishment of exile that will follow. Once, the nation was like a flourishing vine, but with increased

prosperity came a decline in their spiritual lives, a picking and choosing of gods, building an increasing number of pagan altars and sacred stones. Their comfort and contentment had led to them turning from worship of the true God.

Complacency was still an issue when Paul was writing to the Christians in Thessalonica about 'the day of the Lord'. He was concerned that people were feeling so secure and 'at peace' with their current lifestyles that they were losing any sense of importance in making sure their personal spiritual house was in order. His warning is that the peace they enjoy now could be very fragile and end quickly.



Discussion

- 8: Thinking of your own lifestyle, how easy is it for complacency to affect your own spiritual journey?
- 9: How much of a problem is this in the country where you live, and how can the Church play a part in pointing out its dangers, to both individuals with their spiritual well-being, and to governments with their own responsibilities to citizens?
- 10: Can you think of other ways in which life today impacts on an individual's search for well-being and peace?

'We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves.'
(Dalai Lama)

'The most valuable possession you can own is an open heart. The most powerful weapon you can be is an instrument of peace.'

(Carlos Santana)

'There was a time in my life when I thought I had everything - millions of dollars, mansions, cars, nice clothes, beautiful women, and every other materialistic thing you can imagine. Now I struggle for peace.'

(Richard Pryor)

Takeaway

Consider how you view your own lifestyle, and the balance between it and your spiritual life and well-being. If needed, what could you do to redress any imbalance?