



THE THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE

Luke 19:41-48



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Alfred Edersheim says in his book, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah: “Among the outward means by which the religion of Israel was preserved, one of the most important was the centralization and localization of its worship in Jerusalem.”¹ To be an Israelite at the time of Jesus was to love Jerusalem. God is everywhere as King Solomon says, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less the house that I have built (1 Kings 8:27).” God is indeed everywhere. He sees everything:

7 Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
9 If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
11 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,”
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you. (Psalm 139:7-12)

God sees all people and knows all things. Nothing is hidden before Him. But he located Himself in one particular place for the Israelite. He located Himself in the temple that King Solomon built for His people. And then in the second temple that Ezra records being rebuilt. When Solomon completed the temple the glory of the Lord filled the temple visibly one last time (1 Kings 8). When King Solomon dedicated the temple, they slaughtered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep.

Can you imagine the rivers of blood that flowed from the temple?

Have you ever been near a slaughterhouse? Can you imagine the smell around the temple?

¹ The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Alfred Edersheim, 1883

That is the cost of sin.

It is a nasty business! Sin requires blood atonement.

Sin angers God. "Behold the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked (Jeremiah 30:23)." When He comes again, He will judge the nations, "From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty (Revelation 19:15)." If we are left in our natural state of sin, we have nothing from God but wrath.

The sacrifices let the people know that God was actually not angry with them. It let them know that God was with them. That is why the Israelite loved the temple! They knew that God was for them and not against them. The sacrifices showed them that their sin was atoned for. They could live before God with a clean conscience.

At the time of Jesus, many had rejected a clean conscience. Instead of looking to the temple and the sacrifices for the assurance of their right standing before God, they looked to their own works. Sounds familiar doesn't it? Things had gotten so bad that the sellers were extorting the people for large sums of money and even worse, they were selling them inferior animals. Most people did not have animals to offer for sacrifice. This was especially true for Israelites who had to travel from outside the city and outside the country. They would buy an animal for sacrifice from the sellers and offer it to God. They were being fleeced! This is why Jesus said that they had made His house "a den of robbers (v.46)." I can assure you that Jesus didn't throw the sellers out because they were selling SCRIP cards! What they were doing was truly evil. Fleecing people and selling unacceptable animals for the sacrifice!

The temple was supposed to be a “house of prayer (v. 46).” With your sins atoned for, you can talk to God. Prayer means all kinds of talk to God: an exclamation for help in a time of great distress, an exclamation of praise in a time of great joy, a plea for mercy and daily bread, or a hymn of thanksgiving. It could be just telling God how your day went just like you would tell your mom or dad when they ask. When we say, “Our Father in heaven,” “God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear Father (SC III.Introduction).”

This had been turned around as well. Instead of cries for mercy, “God be merciful to me, a sinner (Luke 18:13),” we hear boasts of pride, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men (Luke 18:11)!” The reason God listens to our prayer is because of His mercy. The reason God answers our prayer is because of His mercy. The reason that God forgives you your sin is His mercy! The reason that God provides for you is His mercy! The Pharisee had forgotten God’s mercy and looked to his own works which looked righteous before men. But those works were as filthy rags before God because they were done without faith! The tax collector remembered God’s mercy. He knew his works were as filthy rags before God. He knew his standing before God depended on God’s mercy! Alone! Would that God ever keep us mindful of His mercy!

Has all this talk of animal sacrifices made you nervous? I hope it has. The Old Testament sacrifice of animals for sin pointed to a greater sacrifice. It pointed to God’s Messiah who would come and save God’s people. It pointed to the first visitation of Jesus! As the psalmist says who’s quoted in Hebrews:

Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
But a body have you prepared for me;

In burnt offerings and sin offerings
You have taken no pleasure.
Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
As it is written of me in the scroll of the book.
(Hebrews 10:5-7 quoting Psalm 40:6-8)

The Israelites were to look for the Messiah who would save them from their sin. The sacrifices were a shadow of the thing to come. God Himself would come in human flesh and offer Himself up as a propitiation for all our sins. Propitiation is a technical word in Scripture that means sacrifice for sins.

God took no pleasure in the animal sacrifices. An animal's blood cannot actually cover our sin. If that is all we had, we would be doomed. But Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. God's will is not to count our sin against us. God's will is to count sin against Jesus who bore our sins. The full wrath of God was poured out upon Jesus on the cross:

He was wounded for our transgressions;
He was crushed for our iniquities;
Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
And with His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

This peace. This healing comes from Jesus. He gives us this peace and healing by faith. This is peace with God. Peace in the world is transitory. It waxes and wanes and there is no guarantee of world peace in our lifetime or the lifetime of our kids. The greater peace, that is, peace with God, is guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. God the Father accepted the sacrifice of His only begotten Son for all of your sin! Not only all your sin, but the sin of the whole world!

Oh, that you would know the things that make for peace.

Peace comes in your Baptism.

Peace comes in the Absolution.

Peace comes especially in the Lord's Supper.

These are the things that make for peace. Not some transitory, fleeting peace, but a permanent peace that lasts unto the ages!

Oh, that you would know the things that make for peace.

These are my words but, more importantly, they are the words of Jesus who loves you.

Jesus knows what will happen to Jerusalem and the temple after His Ascension. The stiff-necked people of God will be judged and pay for their rebellion against God and against Rome. Rome finally has their fill of this stiff-necked people and destroys their beloved city and temple. This is the righteous judgment of God against a rebellious people. But it is more than that. It also lets us know that the temple is no longer a place of sacrifice. It is no longer a place where God promises to be found for His people.

God is everywhere as we well know. God promises to be “for you,” however, in the church. The church has replaced the temple as the place where God promised to be for His people. That’s because the church is the location where God’s Word and Sacrament are given out. This is what we confess about the church:

Our churches teach that one holy Church is to remain forever. The Church is the congregation of saints [Psalm 149:1] in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. (AC VII.1)

The Word and Sacraments are the things that make for peace. Especially the Sacrament of the Altar.

The Sacrament of the Altar is the fruit of the once and for all sacrifice. Jesus is still in the body that God prepared for Him. He is forever fully Man and fully God. The fruit of the vine and the fruit of the field become the fruit of the once and for all sacrifice which we receive to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins.

And we receive this forgiveness because of God’s mercy. The tax collector might say this prayer before the Lord’s Supper:

“Lord, I am not worthy to be a guest at your holy table. But you are the friend of sinners, and you will not cast me out. This bread is your body, which bore my sins upon the tree. This wine is your blood, which purifies me from all guilt. At your invitation, I come rejoicing. Receive me, my Savior. Amen.”

We receive the forgiveness of our sins through the mercy of our Father in heaven.

Oh, that you would know the things that make for peace.

Our Lord visits us every Sunday in Word, water, bread, and wine. There is another visitation coming. Our Lord will come again just as He ascended and judgment is coming with Him. In the first great visitation, Jesus did not come in judgment but came so that we might have peace with God (John 3:17). In the second great visitation, Jesus does come with judgment.

Those who take the sacrament without faith will be condemned.

Those who do not come to church to freely receive the peace of God will be condemned.

Those who persist in their sin will be condemned.

They will not be condemned because of what they do. All their sin is paid for. They will be condemned because they do not believe that Jesus is the only way to have peace with God.

Oh, that you would know the things that make for peace. Amen.