

LIFE QUESTIONS



Experiencing Peace

Elim Church, Clapham

Peace can often be misunderstood. It is often depicted in the media as a time of calmness, relaxation with no stress etc. A few years ago, whilst visiting one of the many large gardens in France I was sitting down on a bench admiring the many plants and flowers around me. The quietness was frequently interrupted with one or more birds singing, I was really enjoying the warm and serene atmosphere, when quite unexpectedly a woman came and sat on the bench next to me and commented, "Isn't this peaceful!" Without thinking, I heard myself saying, "Yes, it's relaxing but not necessarily peaceful - the calmness and stillness is wonderful and enjoyable". I then sensed that Holy Spirit was going to open my eyes to something fresh, and found myself saying, "Yes, but look at all the people walking round, some have financial worries, others are facing relationship or health issues, still others are unable to sleep at nights, others have come here to escape from the pressures they find themselves under". I could sense that it suddenly dawned on both of us that peace is far more than the absence of strife, war or problems, but an attitude of the heart!

The Greek and Hebrew understanding of the word 'Peace' encompasses wholeness, completeness, health, prosperity, goodness etc. where in English, the word peace is mainly understood in external terms of tranquillity or the absence of war, strife and conflict but also includes a calmness in thoughts and emotions. A peacemaker is often seen as a passive role and such a person is often seen as weak, where in Biblical terms a peacemaker is not afraid to confront the status quo or aggression. Yet to pursue peace can often be more of a challenge, but always leads to happiness and contentment in the long run.

Real peace is an emotion that comes when a person is secure in who they are, no matter what they may be facing in life. When we begin to feel uncertain or insecure about the future, we lose all sense of peace. However those who believe that God is in control irrespective of what they may be facing - find it easier to experience His peace, because they know that their lives are in His hands, and that He will not do anything that will hurt, injure or harm them. Therefore peace has a lot to do about where your focus lies or what is on your heart or mind.

A number of years ago an art exhibition was announced on the subject of 'Peace'. Quite a number of contributions were received, and many of the submissions were pictures depicting protest marches, others were showing scenes of children happily playing, and others showing pictures of people relaxing or even asleep. There was one picture which initially baffled the judges. A ship was depicted in the midst of a severe storm with boisterous seas and a dark sky broken up with lightning flashes. The judges took a step back whilst looking at the dreary picture for they couldn't see what this had to do with peace. Then one person noticed that in the bottom right hand corner was a cliff face almost hidden by the darkness of the picture, and there in the corner was a little bird sitting on its nest - totally oblivious to everything that was going on around. Here the artist had grasped the real significance of peace and ended up winning first prize in the exhibition.

When there is a lack of peace in our hearts, decision making can become more difficult, because fear, anxiety and uncertainty will influence us to make wrong decisions. Real peace is an inner calmness, contentment and security that is not based on or affected by our surroundings or situations but instead protects us against the doubts, fears and anxieties that can so easily arise in our lives. The prophet Isaiah says, "God will keep in perfect peace all those who trust in him, whose thoughts turn often to the Lord!" (Isa 26:3) Why? Because our minds are upon the one who is bigger than our problems and challenges in life - and He is the only one who can bring us through these victoriously.