

Jesus: Restorer of Peace

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Freddie. Yeah, typically we go through books of the Bible, we'll go through a series on a specific topic, but every once in a while we'll do a one-off kind of thing, and that's today.

So next Sunday we'll be starting a new series, kind of kicking off the New Year's kind of thing. So as Freddie said, my name is Alan. I am one of the pastors here and just so thankful for you to be with us today and Happy New Year.

Yeah, so I can't believe 2023 is here and 2022 is gone. Time is definitely going fast. For those of you that actually stayed up to welcome 2023 and still made it here, thank you so much. Well done. For those of you listening later this week at Welcome 2023 and Stay at Home, well, I know who you are. And let's just say we might have a little chat about your priorities later on.

Just kidding. Just kidding. I know a lot of people are traveling and out, and I honestly would like to be home in my pajamas right now too, just to be quite honest with you. So just kidding.

[1 : 02] We all experience the pressure of this time of year to make resolutions about how we're going to better ourselves, and I am no different. Although one news source says that only 29% of Americans will make a New Year's resolution this year, which is down from 43% from just last year.

I thought that was surprising too. Recently, my wife and I went on a trip to Puerto Rico, and I went surfing more on that trip than I have in the last decade. And let's just say I spent a lot of time on the struggle bus.

So as you can guess, my big resolution is to not only spend more time in the water surfing, but to get back in shape and lose about 25 pounds. Yeah.

Are you going to do that too, Otis? Yeah. Otis is in the best shape of anybody I know. So anyway, those are good goals, and my doctor will especially be happy about the weight loss, and that I have told you all that I am even more motivated.

So there you go. The question I have is, why do 91% of us fail to keep the resolution more than a few weeks? And why do less and less of us actually make resolutions? Are we accepting defeat?

[2 : 14] Are we afraid to take risks? I think it is because even though we see the fruit of our lives and don't particularly care for it, we are sometimes too afraid to address the root cause.

Not all the time. Sometimes things happen that are out of our control when life changes. And I'm not talking about that, but what I am talking about are those that we can control. The why and how did I start this lifestyle or habit, et cetera.

I also feel like we're not alone. We are not the first generation to experience this. This has been going on for millennium, and I feel like this struggle has been happening from the moment sin entered the world.

You see, God created shalom or peace, and sin created war. Shalom in Hebrew is basically harmony or unity, joy, peace between two or more entities.

And in Genesis, God created shalom out of nothingness. When he finished creation, we see diversity, and yet there was order. The earth was full of contrasts and yet harmonized.

[3 : 17] Lion and the deer lying next to each other, those kind of things. The earth teemed with life and peace. Everything was working together as God had purposed it to be in function.

Shalom was present. However, when Adam and Eve stand against God, everything changed. Peace no longer abounded. Unity was destroyed throughout all creation.

We see fear. We see fear. We see worry. We see doubt. Hatred. All of those entered the world. This is why they had to leave Eden. Adam and Eve had to leave the literal location of shalom.

At the moment of sin occurring, we became destined to be at war with ourselves and with each other. But also having this longing to find our way back to Eden, back to God's shalom.

We all experience this tug of war within ourselves of longing to experience peace and joy and unity and still struggling with fear and worry and doubt. This is true for Christians and non-Christians. [4 : 21] This is true for all of us. We all want to better ourselves. We work hard for our education, our careers. Some of us work super hard with the hope of being able to retire early and enjoy the good life, if you will.

Problem is that our paths, we walk to find peace and harmony. That's shalom. They don't bring us to it. They're flawed. History shows us and proves that we can never rise high enough to achieve shalom.

In Micah chapter 4 verses 1 and 2 it says, It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains.

And it shall be lifted up above the hills and peoples shall flow to it. And many nations shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Jesus came to restore true shalom.

[5 : 31] He came to restore shalom in the midst of the world that lacks it. And one day he will return to restore shalom to the whole world. One day he will return and we all will get to experience Eden.

These verses speak to an interesting proclivity in humanity. Throughout human history our achievements are always seen as an elevation of ourselves. We're moving higher.

We're getting a bit closer to perfection, to the good life. We're always climbing higher in scientific discovery, in the arts, in technology, in psychology, in all of those ologies.

Yet with all these advances in knowledge, we somehow stay the same. As I am speaking, there are wars. There are depressions.

There are dissatisfaction. Busyness. Stress. Chaos. All of those are happening right now. These have always been since sin entered the world and they always will be until Jesus' return.

[6 : 32] The paths we pursue to bring us peace and harmony, that's shalom. They don't bring us to it. We are caught in this cycle of thinking. If we just solve this problem, then there will be no more hunger.

There will be no more war or depression. And yet, when that one thing is achieved, another problem is found. Right? It seems like the further we advance ourselves in STEM, the sciences, the technologies, the engineering, the mathematics fields, to make peace and harmony, it seems like it is just beyond our reach.

Why is that? Because the best thought plans and achievements from us, they're flawed. We'll always have an imperfection.

It may be the tiniest inkling of a flaw, but it is still flawed. And therefore, we'll always need improvements. Now, does this mean we should just throw in the towel on trying to achieve achievements and advancements in STEM?

Absolutely not. I mean, my father-in-law just returned home from having a double lung transplant. We just celebrated his birthday Friday, and he was able to blow out his candles.

[7 : 44] Last year, he couldn't do that. Last year, his grandchildren blew out his candles for him. It's a miracle. And then I witnessed him dancing the shag. I was blown away. So, should we throw in the towel?

No. No, we shouldn't. That was a great time of celebration we had as a family. That was not even an option a few decades ago. Now, he's been able to not only extend his life, but his quality of life for a number of years because of our ability to seek and comprehend knowledge and wisdom.

Micah 4 goes on in verse 3. He says, He shall judge between many peoples and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nations shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. Peace most clearly means no war. We want world peace.

We see bumper stickers all the time proclaiming world peace or coexist, et cetera, but that is impossible. Until Christ's return, there will always be conflict. I've been rushed, famous quote, ignorance leads to fear, and fear leads to hatred, and hatred leads to violence.

[8 : 59] We have seen this path of destruction play out over and over, resulting in millions of innocent lives being lost. We will always have disputes. We will always disagree.

If you don't believe me, please come over to my house for a visit and see just how fast siblings can disagree. Right? Yeah. Yeah.

Then, of course, there is the temptation of power that comes with knowledge and advancement. If I know something that you don't that makes my life better than yours, well, then I have power over you.

I have a distinct advantage. Look at the ring of power in the Lord of Rings. It started out offering help, a good thing, but that wouldn't stay that way. Power pulls at us to wield it in a selfish manner. None of us are above being enslaved to power. No people group is either. This is a big reason why the text references strong nations far away. Even thousands of years ago, far away strong nations were something to be feared.

[10:03] It seems that once we experience power, there is an insatiable appetite for more. There is no form of contentment. We need more. We need more. We want more.

The history leading up to the writing of Micah and also following it is seeing a progression from one superpower to the next. We see the Medo-Persians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Greeks, and the Romans.

All of these became dominant superpowers at one point in history, one succeeding another. They all conquered many other weaker nations around them. As a matter of fact, Ataxerxes is famously titled the King of Kings.

Literally translated, King over all kings because of all the nations and kings he has subjected to his rule. The common thread we see with all of these superpowers is a mighty king and nation rising up and conquering and enslaving and oppressing other smaller nations or people groups.

However, Jesus, the true King of Kings, comes to conquer all nations, not to oppress, but to set free. That is a major shift.

[11:09] That is the exact opposite of all other nations. He doesn't conquer to better himself and his kingdom. He conquers to bring freedom, to restore peace and hope, to bring an abundance of joy.

When he comes, the scripture says that swords will be turned into plowshares and spears turned into pruning hooks. There will be no need of warriors, no need of armies or navies or even marines. We will be farmers and ranchers and cultivators of creation. And that is the next part we see.

Farming and ranching in today's world is tough. It's hard work.

And we are losing farmers all the time because of it. But they are tough because we have no shalom with the earth. When sin entered the world, a curse began.

Genesis 3, 17. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

[12:09] Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. And you shall eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken. For you are dust. And to dust you shall return.

This is a curse that has plagued us from that moment. And if you've ever planted a small garden, you know what I am talking about. There is a constant battle between the kind of results you are seeking.

The tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, etc., etc. And the weeds. Just leave your garden unattended for one week and see what happens. Massive weeds appear from nothing and take over.

It is a constant battle to the end. Weeds, watering, fertilizer. And there is definitely lots of sweat on your face. Continuing on in this passage from Micah 4.

[13:08] Micah verse 4 says, But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree. And no one shall make them afraid. For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

How amazing does that sound? There is so much to go around that no one will come begging for food. Each of us will have our own property. And all of our gardens will be flourishing abundantly with so much produce.

It will no longer require a constant battle with the weeds and thistles that we see in Genesis 3. True shalom will be restored for the whole world. There will be no ignorance.

There will be no fear. And no hatred. We all will experience an abundance. There will be no war but a true world peace. And even more important, there will no longer be any separation from God.

All of us will be reintroduced to Eden. Micah 4.5 says, For all the peoples walk each in the name of its God. But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

[14 : 14] The mountain is there for all to see and climb. But only so many will climb. Those that choose not to climb can't see beyond their own desires. And so they live day to day with hopes that their idol will help them through their tougher times.

In the end, the decision comes down to our own commitment. Will we climb the mountain? Will we be touched by the Lord?

Will we be used of the Lord to bring his good to the world? God has his program. He has defined it. This is the sovereign God speaking.

But we need to fully realize that before we have a choice too. Our decisions will impact our lives. If you sense a desire to climb to God's mountain, why don't you decide that right now?

Do you sense God drawing you? First, ask the Lord to forgive you through Jesus Christ's work on the cross and then go. Get moving. Some of you may be confused.

[15 : 16] You more than likely have been stained by the world. You want the Lord. There is no doubt about that. But you have stopped climbing. You want to stay close enough to the plains of the earth so that you can have the supposed best of both worlds.

But the choice to stay in the world keeps you from ascending before God. Your worldliness is a stench to him. Why not put it off? Why not seek the Lord?

Why not seek forgiveness and go meet the Lord? Our whole lives as God's people is considered a climb. We are stepping closer and closer to the Lord.

We have no other good. No other purpose. No other aim. What he wants is what we want. Where he leads, we will follow.

What he asks us to give up, we give up. We are his and we delight in being his. How we respond to the world and those that choose not to pursue the ways of God is vitally important too.

[16 : 19] Look at how Jude instructs us to wait. In 21 it says, Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Be merciful to those who doubt. Snatch others from the fire and save them. To others show mercy mixed with fear, hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

God instructs us to be givers of mercy. Notice how Jude uses the word mercy three times in those two verses. Three verses.

As you wait to experience the vision of God's mercy, be merciful and show mercy. We must be merciful because God has shown us mercy. Luke 6.36 says, God desires mercy, not sacrifice. Matthew 9.13 Mercy is an attribute of God and a sign therefore that we are his children. What would a week of merciful acts look like? When someone at work says a harsh word, when someone criticizes you, humiliates you or denigrates you, what will loving mercy look like?

[17 : 30] What will the effect be on your work colleagues, on your boss when you give mercy? And at home, this week when you are ignored, underappreciated, taken for granted, or when voices are raised, what will showing mercy look like?

What will the effect be of showing mercy toward a spouse, towards your children, towards your parents? Let's start the new year off with filling this week with little acts of mercy.

Loving mercy, giving mercy, showing mercy. As the band comes up, if you're here and not yet a Christian, you may be here today because of a New Year's resolution.

One that statistically speaking is pretty much doomed to fail. What if you are here because the God of the universe is wanting you to experience the peace and joy of Eden?

So that's shalom. Jesus is a king, but he wants to bring you and I freedom, not oppression. He wants to bring an abundance, not insufficiency.

[18 : 40] The question is, are you willing to keep pursuing the things of this world, only to experience lack, want, need, and unrest over and over? I ask you to seriously consider a different route, not just a whimsical resolution.

If you're here today and listening and a follower of Christ, how has your experience with shalom been over the past year? Have you been living in the peace of God? Have you been extending mercy to those around you?

Let today be the day where we choose to follow God more and more. The day where we choose to maybe take the more difficult route and walk up the mountain, get off the flat ground and be different.

Be a giver of mercy. Be a giver of peace. Be a giver of grace. Be a giver of grace. I ask you to take a few moments to consider these questions, and if need be, do business with God.

Repent, and let's move forward. Amen. Amen. God, we are just thankful that you are a God that loves us.

[20 : 21] You are a God that cares for us no matter where we are, no matter how much doubt, no matter how much fear, no matter how much worry, anxiety, no matter how much all of those things we experience, you love us.

You care for us. You want the best for us. And so, God, I just pray that today, as we kick off 2023, that today would be a day where we choose to become more like you, that we choose to put our faith, hope, and trust in you, God.

If that's asking you to be Lord and Savior, and asking you to forgive us of our sins, or if that's asking you to forgive us for having doubt and fear and worry, may today be that day, God. Help us to be more like you.

Help us to be known as givers of mercy, and givers of grace, and givers of peace to the world that has none. Help us to be a light in the very, very dark world, Lord. Thank you for all these things, God.

Amen.