OPENING THE SCRIPTURES

Peace and Those Who Make It, Part 2
Jesus, Righteousness, and Peace

David Anguish

It follows naturally from the Old Testament's view of peace that the Messiah would prioritize its establishment. As noted in part 1, the Hebrew concept entails entrance "into a state of wholeness and unity, a restored relationship" (Carr 1980, 930) wherein people and communities are made right with God and become who they are intended to be. The absence of tension and distress is a by-product of this objective reality, possible only because of "the creation and maintenance of a state of truth, honesty, righteousness, and justice" (Nystrom 1997, 212).

The Messiah's Mission of Peace

A statement of that objective reality and its outcomes serves as an apt summary of the goal of the messianic mission. Old Testament messianic texts regularly highlight the goal of peace and the qualification of the anointed ruler to bring that state into existence. For example, in a context from which Matthew quotes previous verses (Matt 4.15–16; from Isa 9.1–2), Isaiah 9.6 includes "Prince of Peace" among the names the promised child will be called. Verse 7 adds the assurance that the increase of his government and peace will have no end as he establishes and upholds his reign "with justice and with righteousness." Later, the servant song in Isaiah 42.1–4 promises that the LORD'S chosen servant "will bring forth justice to the nations" (v. 1). Similarly,

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Zechariah promises a coming era of peace and prosperity for Zion, declaring that there will "be a sowing of peace" which will see the people speak the truth to each other, render judgments "that are true and make for peace," and refuse to "devise evil … against one another" or "love … false oaths" (Zech 8.12, 16–17). The coming king will accordingly be righteous, grant salvation, and "speak peace to the nations" (Zech 9.9–10).

Exemplary of the New Testament's application of passages like these to the messianic mission is Luke 4.16–30, a text recognized as "programmatic for our understanding of the mission of Jesus in the Gospel" of Luke (Green 1995, 76). As Jesus begins his synagogue address, he consciously identifies with Isaiah 61.1–2 to announce that he has come to bring good news to the poor, declare liberty to captives and the oppressed, and bring recovery of sight to the blind. He says that these works are being fulfilled in him and shows that "the year of the Lord's favor" has commenced (Luke 4.18–21). Later in Luke, as he grants forgiveness and healing, he declares that his actions bring to the people peace (εἰρήνη, *eirēnē*) and the wholeness entailed in salvation (Luke 7.50; 8.48; note that the verb σῴζω, [*sōzō*] is translated by both "saved" and "made well" in these texts). But his mission of peace and salvation does not mean that there will never be conflict. In the context of sayings concerning readiness for judgment and compliance with God's will, Luke also reports Jesus's warning that his mission will at times bring division, an understandable outcome since some will not willingly submit to God's will and have their lives made right (Luke 12.49–53; cf. 12.35–48, 54–56).

In Colossians 3, Paul pulls together the various elements of peace as the objective reality that creates truth, honesty, righteousness, and justice in those who follow the Messiah. There, he implores the church to "put to death" sinful attitudes and behaviors that are at odds with God's glory and, as his "holy and beloved" people, "put on" compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, and love (Col 3.5–9, 12–14). This is expected of people who "have been raised with Christ" (v. 1) and are committed to seek and set their minds on the things that are above. They make this commitment because they have put to death their former lives and have been put right with God (vv. 1–4). He summarizes the expectations of the new life envisioned in these statements with the exhortation to the church to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body" (v. 15).

Peacemakers Sow Righteousness

With the background from the Old Testament (part 1) and Jesus and his followers (above) in mind, we turn to James 3–4 where James applies Scripture's comprehensive idea of peace to the tension and strife that were creating problems in the community. After exposing the failure of demonic wisdom and extolling the virtues of the wisdom from above (3.13–18), James concludes with a summary statement of the benefits of peace: "And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (Jas 3.18). His statement reflects the Old Testament understanding of peace, echoing Isaiah 32.16–17 (see part 1):

> Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,

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> and righteousness above in the fruitful field.
> And the effect of righteousness will be peace,
> and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

That James calls attention to righteousness and justice should not surprise us for he has shown concern for those virtues throughout his letter (cf. 1.27; 2.1–7, 14–17). Furthermore, as identified in James 3.17, the traits of people who are wise imitate the nature of God, characterizing people who are right with him and living as they should.

But notice that verses 17–18 effectively show that peace is not defined in terms of what is not present, i.e., by the absence of tension and conflict, but rather as the active consequence of being and doing right. James's focus in verse 18 is on "the ones doing peace" (τοῖς ποιοῦσιν εἰρήνην, *tois poiousin eirēnēn*). This also comports with themes James develops in the letter. The summary paragraph on wisdom in 3.13–18 is filled with language that calls the readers to confront sinful attitudes and behaviors rooted in jealousy and selfish ambition. Then, in 4.1–3, he elaborates the root issues undergirding their strife, challenging them to proactively control their desires, curb their covetousness, ask for right things in the right way, and cease fighting and quarrelling.

Verse 4 casts the matter in terms of their relationship with God. As people who "hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (2.1), they have been made right with God or, to use James's word, have joined Abraham in being God's friends (4.4; cf. 2.23). But their submission to worldly wisdom, evident in their strife, belies that standing. So, James says, they need to reaffirm their commitment to God and act like his friends. Using a series of imperative verbs, he says that this means they must submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, and purify their lives (4.7–8). They must also be wretched, mourn, weep, and turn around their laughter (v. 9). In sum, they are to "humble [themselves] before the Lord" and he will in turn "exalt" them. When they do, they will stop speaking against and judging one another (vv. 11–12).

The actions James prescribes will show whether they are making peace and planting a harvest of righteousness (3.18). Notice that, in their very nature, none of the prescribed actions can be done with passive attitudes that simply acquiesce in the interest of "keeping the peace." As Scripture shows and James assumes, genuine peace is not like that.

Conclusion

In view of contemporary understanding and behaviors undertaken to avoid or minimize conflict just to have peace, the biblical view of the matter should prompt us to self-reflection. Do we ever lose our inner peace because we have done things to undercut our friendship with God? Do we ever ignore sins in the interest of peace? Do we allow selfish and divisive attitudes to go unchecked lest we disrupt the peace? Do we understand that genuine peace entails righteousness and justice? Do we appreciate the cost involved in forgiving others so things will be put to the right, i.e., so things will be truly at peace?

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Additional Thoughts on James

"The next of wisdom's characteristics, which our translation renders as 'peace loving' [Jas 3.17 NIV], is literally 'peaceful.' This does not suggest, as some may hear it, an attitude of peace by abdication—like the couple who had just celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Someone asked the gentleman the secret of their marital bliss. 'Well,' the old man drawled, 'the wife and I had this agreement when we first got married. It went like this: When she was bothered about somethin' she'd jus' tell me and git it off her chest. And if I was mad at her about somethin', I was able to take a long walk. I s'ppose you could attribute our happy marriage to the fact that I have largely lived an outdoor life.'

"There are indeed proper times to 'take a walk,' but James is not recommending a peace that depends on walking away from conflict.…"

~ R. Kent Hughes. 1991. *James: Faith That Works*. Crossway Books, 157–158

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