

## **“Peace Like A River”**

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Luke 1:67-79

Today we are going to be talking more about God’s work in this world, specifically bringing peace.

Jesus was understood to be the Prince of Peace and for the first couple of hundred years of the Church, people were committed to live lives of peace, following Jesus’ example. This meant that those who committed themselves to Jesus’ teaching refused to participate in any armed forces, or participate in government sanctioned military violence.

It wasn’t until the 300s that followers of Jesus were incorporated into the military. This came first with Roman Emperor Constantine creating tolerance for Christians in the empire, and then declaring Christianity the official religion of the empire, marrying religion and politics creating the first ever Christian nation.

In this new Christian nation, citizens were forced to convert to Christianity, then serve in the military to carry out the political ambitions of the Emperor. This entailed expanding the empire by

marching into battle as “God’s army” to kill enemies for God and nation.

This was a marked shift away from the beginnings of the faith when followers of Jesus were committed to peace and pacifism.

Through the writings that talk about the life of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) as well as the letters of Paul and other writings in the New Testament, the people of God followed Jesus’ example as peacemakers in a culture that relied on violence, force, and war to maintain what was considered “peace.”

However, the reality was it was only peace for those who held the power of the sword. This is why the general masses of people often lived in fear of the government and military as well as hostile neighboring countries who might come and overthrow their country’s military power.

Christians lived against the grain as a community of people standing for all people to have peace. That was the counter cultural way of life for the Church’s first couple of centuries.

The passage that we are going to be looking at today was written by Luke about a time before Jesus’

birth, but looked forward to the new way of peace that would be ushered by God into the world.

While Mary was pregnant with Jesus, her cousin Elizabeth, who was beyond child-bearing years, was also pregnant.

Elizabeth's husband was a priest named Zechariah. While Zechariah was carrying out his priestly responsibility one day, offering incense in the sanctuary, an angel from God told him about the son his wife would give birth to in her old age.

The angel told Zechariah that their son would not only be a great man, but be one of God's prophets like Elijah, who happened to be considered one of the most powerful of all God's prophets of old. The angel said that many people would come to know God through their son and he would pave the way for God's work on a bigger scale.

From that day until Elizabeth gave birth to their baby, who was by the way, John the Baptist, Zechariah was unable to speak.

As soon as Zechariah could talk, he praised God. This is what he said...

**READ LUKE 1:67-79**

Zechariah said that as a prophet, John would prepare the way for God's work to be done in Jesus. John would bring to people the knowledge of salvation and forgiveness. John would declare a new day when God would provide light to those who were being oppressed in the darkness. John would declare all of this so that the people may live in peace.

All of John's work culminated in a declaration of a day of peace that God would bring.

This was a tangible peace. A real peace. A peace the people longed for. A peace that literally could liberate them from the sea of oppressive violence they had known all their lives.

Where do you go to find the reality of rejuvenating peace in your lives?

I love waterfalls and rivers. One of my favorite vacations was when Qwynn and I took a trip to Tennessee a handful of years ago. While there, we were able to climb along a number of rivers and jump across the stepping stones across the rivers. The picture on the cover of the program is Qwynn next to one of those Tennessee rivers.

On another trip Qwynn and I went to the Upper Peninsula and visited a number of waterfalls and rivers.

Have you been to a place like that, where you feel as though you could sit next by a waterfall or bubbling river for hours and simply soak in the environment. I can't imagine a more peaceful place to be.

People have been going to rivers for millennia to find rest, nourishment for their souls and peace. In fact, there are psalms in our Bible written about 2500 years ago talking about God's peace flowing through people like a river.

It turns out people for generations have been responding to a phenomena that we now have science to understand better. We can now measure something called ions in the air and their impact on us depending on their negative or positive electrical charge.

Scientists have discovered that positive ions are emitted from computer screens, TV screens, phone screens and other screen-based devices, and are plentiful around busy roads and congested places without plants.

Positive charged ions chemically interact with our body tissue and even with our DNA and can produce negative effects, leaving people feeling more depressed, lethargic, with more joint problems, more acute respiratory issues, and general unpleasantness.

Negative ions however have positive impact on us. Negative ions have been found in higher abundance outside in the rain and especially when lightning splits the sky charging the water molecules in the air. They are found in the ultraviolet rays from the sun and are produced in the normal growth process of many living plants.

But what about those bubbling rivers in Tennessee? Researches say negative ions are created through what is called the Lenard Effect. This happens wherever water collides with itself like at waterfalls, bubbling creeks, with waves along a beach, or on riverbanks. The Lenard Effect is also active creating negative ions around the water fountains we might find down the street in Shain Park, in the shopping mall, or a hotel lobby.

Have you found yourself drawn to those places, or feeling good in those places? It just might be that your body is responding to the negative ion concentrations in those places and bringing your body peace and balance.

It is no wonder that people in ancient times talked about God's presence in rivers that brought peace and life.

Psalm 46 says “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.”

In ancient times rivers were symbols foreshadowing the peace that God would eventually offer to all people.

In Revelation, the last book in the New Testament, John wrote about the water of life flowing in a river from God’s throne. This river water brought life and peace to all people throughout the world through time.

The Gospel of John talks about those who believe in Jesus having rivers of living water flowing out of their belly (John 7:38).

However, these images are much more than symbolic. People knew life was provided by God through literal rivers of water. We are often disconnected from the natural world in our consumer culture, but in ancient times, people relied on rivers to bring water to nourish crops, animals, and provide what they needed for life.

It only makes sense that the people took these realities and expanded them with a spiritual, cosmic, and theological significance.

Certainly we can read the stories in the Bible, like the declaration of

peace from Zechariah that looked forward to the peace the Jesus would bring. These stories can be inspirational and reaffirm our faith.

We can also look around us at the physical world to find signs of God’s love, God’s presence that brings us peace.

This reminds us that God works through scripture as well as nature to bring peace and balance to our lives. Let’s celebrate that today!

God certainly works in mysterious ways, and the more we understand through science, the more concrete ways we can praise God for creating this amazing world we live in.

We truly have all we need within us and around us to live a life of peace in this world. We can open our eyes and our lungs and absorb the reality of God’s peace, even through the negative ions around us.

Praise God through whom ALL blessings flow in the river that brings us life!