

Peace, Peace (Part Three): Contentment

An Environment and Mindset of Peace

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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I cannot say that the last month or two of my life has been peaceful. It is not that I have been arguing with Beth or any of our family members. I have not been at odds with our neighbor. Actually, we get along with our neighbors pretty well.

I have had no problem with the feds or any state or local government. I even have not had any kind of a barrage of nasty emails from trolls or argumentative subscribers to the Berean or the *Forerunner*. Otherwise, I think we have done pretty well. I have not been fighting a health problem or having any spiritual problems like not resisting temptation.

But it has been a tough one and a half, two months. Beth and I have been fighting our house. We have been there for 32 years now, since 1994. And of course, in a house that is that old (it was actually built before then in 1983), things start to break down and not run, but the things that we had, but one, were things that we had put in, in earlier years. But I will tell you the tale.

First, our water heater reached the end of its natural life. It had put in a decade or more of fine service. It was hot for us when we needed it. And rather than wait for it to leak all over our new floors, we decided to replace it. We could say we were engaging in preventative maintenance here. It is a nice chunk of change to prevent anything like that, but we were good to go.

Then, second, the power went out one day and it stayed off for a while, and when it came back on, we believe this happened, that the surge fried a circuit board on our heat pump.

Now at 14 years old, it was well past its average lifespan. And we had already repaired it, you know, buying this \$400 part, buying this \$800 part, and all that stuff you do to try to keep something working for as long as possible, but we needed a new one. It was old. So, being over a barrel—of

course you are when your heat pump goes out in the South and spring and summer are approaching, you have to have AC down here—we decided to replace it. We bit the bullet. And believe it or not, the good ones are a lot more expensive than you might think, but we swallowed and had it done.

Third, not two weeks ago, we received our water bill and it was \$305. I was like, "What's going on?" Three times more than normal. In Charlotte, we bundle it with the waste and stormwater fee. Ask me about that one time, but it is usually around \$100. But \$305! And I had noticed that the time before it was \$245. I probably should have gotten on the horn at that point, but things were going on like Days of Unleavened Bread, and so went another month and it was just getting worse and worse and worse.

We obviously had a leak somewhere. Water was running through our pipes and onto the ground. So I called Charlotte Water and Carter Quality Plumbing. (I will put out a plug for them. They are the plumbing company that we use here at the church and they are good folk.) But the plumber found a leak near the water meter. It was about eight or ten feet away. And he repaired it for \$700.

But before he filled in the hole, he checked the meter and discovered water was still flowing even though the main had been shut off at the house. "Okay," he said, "you've got another leak." Obviously. He could not find it. He went all up and down our line between the meter and the house, and he could not find any soft spots or anything.

So he said, "You need a leak detector out here. We've got a guy that we use." And so I called them and this guy, he was there with his headphones on because they use a kind of a sonar probe or whatever to listen to the leaks as he went up and down the line. And he went like this into the ground and he hit the pipe and caused another leak. So he had to dig that up and repair it free and then he got back to it and finally, after going up and down the line, I do not know, six times, he found the leak and it was within about three feet of the first leak that had been repaired.

But he could not hear it because it was about another one, one and a half feet deeper than the first leak. He was not expecting it. His probe only went down ten inches, maybe one foot, but he finally found this other leak. And we paid another \$700 to get that one fixed.

We found out that instead of putting a stop when they come through and do your subdivisions, they put meters out everywhere and then they put out a little stub and they stop it for whenever a house gets built and then they connect the house with the meter. They take off that stub and they make a full line there. Well, they had not capped it, but they had put a stop valve on it. And 40, 43 years later, that valve started to leak and that was what was causing us to have so many problems, or part of what was causing us to have so many problems.

So they were scratching their heads. Why would anybody do that? That is not what we do today. They fixed the leak and he said, "Okay, I'm going to check the meter again, see if we solved the problem." No. There was still a leak. The meter has a little, looks like a gear on a watch. And if that is moving, there is water being drawn and it was going very slowly, but you could definitely tell it was moving. And he says, "There is something drawing water. Let's check your house." So we went all over the house, looked at every fixture, every faucet, and nothing. It was just fine.

He said, "Okay, I'm going to shut off your hot water. See if we could eliminate the hot water lines." So they shut off the hot water. That little thing was just going around and around and around. He said the thing that I had been fearing this whole time and for many years. He said, "You have a leak in your slab."

And the only option that made any sense for us was a whole house re-pipe. And that was done this past week, the week I had a sermon. And it was fine. I mean, the guys that came in they were jovial enough and did the work and, you know, we enjoyed having them. They are upstanding citizens, but you know, when people are in your house, it just gets a bit disruptive.

And when they are re-piping your house, it gets a lot disruptive. So we have, what is it? Twenty-two, twenty-three holes in our walls now where they had

to re-pipe everything. They did not have to re-pipe our one side of the house through the attic because those went through the wall.

So that is why they opened up all the walls behind these things. But they had to re-pipe through the attic, all our pipes going to our kitchen and laundry room and it is a big mess. And someday, maybe this week, we are going to get it all fixed and we have already paid a lot of money to have that done.

Now, all this was not as intensive as fighting a war. I mean, I am sure that is a lot more stressful and all that, but it did produce in me a deep state of discontent. I saw a lot of our hard earned, hard collected savings drain almost literally out of our accounts and another new long-term debt arise. Now these repairs and the payouts did not help my stress levels one tiny bit and did not help my sleep quality either.

But I got through it. What inner peace I had was near to running dry. (There is another pun if you did not get it.) We were dismayed, but not devastated. We will live through this and probably laugh about it in twenty or thirty years. But like my sermons during the Days of Unleavened Bread, this sermon will focus on peace. I need to talk about this. I hope you do not mind.

Part One, which I gave on the first day of Unleavened Bread, dealt with Christ's sacrifice to create peace between God and mankind. Now that we have been given grace and been justified by God, we have peace with Him. We have an opportunity for a relationship with Him. And so we can live in a way that other people in this world cannot. Because other people in this world, as Romans 8 tells us, are in enmity with God. They cannot keep His law. They cannot have a relationship with God because this kind of peace, in which our sins are forgiven and we can come before the Father through Jesus Christ and His blood, just has not been applied to them.

Part Two, which I gave on the last day of Unleavened Bread, covered another kind of peace. It is related, but not the same. This kind of peace is the one Christ gives to believers through the Holy Spirit, which He promised to His disciples who had made the New Covenant.

He said very clearly there in John 14 that He left His peace with them. I give you My peace, He says, and so there is a certain kind of peace that comes

from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and it, along with grace, we found, should be the reigning condition of our lives so we can grow in righteousness. Remember Paul starting off his epistles with grace and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Those things, that grace that the Father gives and the peace that the Son gives, makes the perfect environment for us to begin growing after our justification, our sanctification process, as we call it.

Now this sermon, Part Three, will deal with a third facet of peace that arises from one's perception of wholeness or completeness. This is an internal mindset. We could call it even a state of being that is inextricably linked to God's gift of peace. We have peace. We have this feeling of completeness, of wholeness, of contentment because of what Christ does for us and how He leads us through our lives.

Another way to look at it is that we can think of it as our proper reaction or response to the peace He gives. When Christ gives us His peace and we are under the state of peace with God, then it falls on us to do something with that peace, with that environment, with the other gifts that He gives us. And if we do it right, we live in a state of peace, in a state of contentment, in a state of, you could even call it shalom, of well-being.

So with this kind of peace working within us, we feel the proper kind of satisfaction and contentment. We look at our lives and can smile and say things are well. Things are going as they should go. We are content with our lot and we need nothing further to make our life joyful and full of purpose and achievement.

Now this is not like the Laodicean, who said he had need of nothing. He was saying that he did not need Christ. But I am saying that once we have Christ and we are reacting and responding to Him in the proper way, we truly do not need anything more.

When we have this peace, because we are responding to the Father's and the Son's peace given to us, we are also content because we know we are going somewhere special. That it is not just our life today that is good because of Christ being in it and working with us, but He has also got us on a trajectory

for the ultimate in achievements, if you want to put it that way, the eternal life in the Kingdom of God. So we can have a proper sense of satisfaction with our lives because of all those things put together. Acknowledging, of course, that it is only through Christ and what God does that these things have come upon us and helped us and are providing for us in every way.

Let us go to Hebrews 13, verses 20 through 21. This is where we ended last time on the last day of Unleavened Bread, and I want to use this as a springboard for the rest of this sermon. The author writes:

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

For those of you who like to think about who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews, this term, this phrase, "the God of peace" is a fairly telltale sign that it was written by the apostle Paul. At least he was the mind behind it, that God was inspiring to write these words.

Now why do I say that? Well, Paul uses this term, this phrase, "the God of peace," and he is the only one who does in the Bible, in benedictions at the conclusions of his epistles, particularly in Romans, II Corinthians, Philippians, and I Thessalonians. We will look at some of those in a minute.

This tells us something because he is also the same one who uses peace at the beginning, in a salutation of his epistles, and so his epistles, especially these ones, Romans, II Corinthians, Philippians, and I Thessalonians, are bookended by the concept of peace. So it makes this title, the God of Peace, quite significant. We have to think about it. We have to study it a little bit. What is he trying to tell us in saying that God gives us peace at the beginning of an epistle as he begins his teaching and at the end when he concludes his teaching and then hands it off to the people who he taught? Okay, what are you going to do with it? Peace is a very important part of this process.

I also mentioned last time that he gives nearly equal importance to grace and peace. And those two concepts are right here also in Hebrews 13:20-21. Because he is talking about what Christ did for us in sacrificing Himself. And what we find is that both grace and peace are necessary conditions, or states, for Christian life and growth. We need to be in the state of grace from the Father and we also need to be in a condition of peace. Not externally, necessarily, because that often does not happen. Just go back and listen to what I said about my last month. And people going through worse things than that.

But we need to have this condition of peace between our ears and in our hearts so that we can go forward in the sanctification process. And we will get to all that in a bit.

Now, here in Hebrews 13:20-21, the author desires the God of peace to equip His people with everything good that they may do His will. If you have an ESV, that is exactly what it says. That the God of peace, to equip His people with everything good that they may do His will.

The New King James has something that I think is actually a little better because I think it is more descriptive. It says that "the God of peace. . . make you complete." We could also use the words fit, make you fit, or prepared, "in every good work to do His will." That is a little bit more descriptive of what is happening to us here, if we have God's peace and we follow through on it.

What He is doing here is talking about the perfection of the saints or the completion of the saints. This is something that the Protestant world does not talk about a whole lot because they believe that once you are justified, you are saved, and there is really nothing that you have to do beyond that.

Now some denominations are better at saying that we should become holy and we should conform to the teachings of Jesus Christ, but the doctrinal basis of those denominations is that you are saved at baptism, you are saved when you accept Jesus as your personal Savior.

But the whole thrust of the New Testament, especially, is that that is not the case. As I have mentioned before, if God does not want us growing in righteousness or becoming holy, why does He have so much in His Book about growth? I mean, I have said this before too. If He did not need us to grow any, the New Testament could be like 50 pages. Just His life. He did not need all that stuff from Paul explaining what we have to do. But no, He crammed the New Testament full of instruction about what to do after you receive the Holy Spirit. What to do with all that time you have between your baptism and your death.

He wants something to happen. And He gives us all the gifts and the favor that we need, even the environment of peace, in order for that to happen. So this is what Paul is talking about here at the end of Hebrews. He has just given them instruction and now he says, "What I desire is for the God of peace to help you, to equip you, to prepare you for everything that is coming up so that you can be doing His will all the time. So that you could be like Him, like Jesus Christ."

So he, with one phrase after another, shows us here in Hebrews 13:20-21 how this works. We are not going to go into it all that deeply, but you can see here that all of the factors are there, and we just need to respond now that we have the Holy Spirit and we have the instruction and God has provided peace. The ball is in our court. Let us do His will. All the things have been made for us. We just have to jump in and do it.

Our Lord Jesus died and God brought Him up from the dead. He appointed Him the great Shepherd. And He made with us the everlasting covenant. You see all these things just being, . . . okay, Paul is backing us into a corner here. All this has been done for you and God is not finished.

He is going to equip us. He is going to prepare us, make us complete so that we can do good works. Why? Because good works perfect us. They complete us. They teach us things. They teach us lessons. They help us learn good habits.

And so he is telling the people here, let us get on the ball here and begin to do the things because we have got all that we need to do them. We just need to do them.

Now remember James 3:18, which says that "the fruit of righteousness is sown" (or we could even add in best sown) in a state of peace "by those who make peace." When you combine this with Hebrews 13:20, the apostle asserts that though God gives peace, the Christian must at the same time be actively *making* peace. It cannot just stop with trying to be a good person. You have to be actively making peace. It is the righteous response to being given God's peace to make peace in our lives.

Let us go to Matthew 5:9. If you know your chapters, you will know exactly where we are. These are the Beatitudes where I spent much of my life in 2022 and 2023. This is one of the first founding principles that Jesus taught.

Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

This is an incredibly deep statement and it ties together this teaching that I have been doing on peace. It comes, then, as no wonder that Jesus' beatitude on peace focuses on being a peacemaker. He was already set and determined that He was going to give peace. He wanted His people to be peacemakers once they got it. And it was those two things, the combination, but it is that dual effort toward peace—the peace that Jesus gives and the peacemaking we try to do, and also within ourselves and in our interactions with others—it is only through that dual effort that we can become sons of God.

If we are not peacemakers, we just have to turn this around, if we are not peacemakers, we will not become sons of God. Why is that? Because that is how *He* is. Our purpose is to become like Jesus Christ. God is a God of peace. He is constantly at peace with Himself and with the Word, and He is working for peace in all of His relationships. We have a long way to go before we are totally at peace with God.

I am using we, I mean humanity, the people that He made to be His sons and daughters. But His goal is to be at peace with *everyone*, every individual,

every one of His sons and daughters. So this means that as the firstfruits, as the ones He has called in this age, His elect, we have to grow in this trait. We have to become peacemakers, not just recipients of peace. But we have to then take it in and work it out toward others just like we have to do with love.

God gives us His love. John tells us He gave it to us first. And why? He wants us to spread it abroad like He spreads it abroad to others. The same works with peace. The same works with kindness. The same works with joy. The same works with faith. The same works with gentleness. Go through the fruit of the Spirit. All of them come from God and flow through us out to others.

So like a lot of these other attributes, they are part gift and part practice. They are not supposed to stop with us. "Oh, I'm so peaceful now. I will just go away from everyone and meditate. I love humming. I am at such peace." Those people are not being peacemakers. They are not using the peace that God gives, if God has given them peace at all.

So God will not do it all for us. We must reciprocate His peace-giving by being peacemakers. And once such an environment is in place where He is giving peace and it is flowing through us and we are giving peace toward others, God can work so much more productively and we will make leaps and bounds in coming into the image of Jesus Christ.

How many times did Jesus actually not work in peace with even His enemies? He tried to be at peace with all men. I am sure that they frustrated Him a lot because they would not reciprocate peace back.

And His teachings were certainly not what they wanted to hear, but they were the truth. And whether or not the unconverted people responded properly to it was, in a sense, neither here nor there. He came and preached the message that He preached. But we do not see Him turning in anger and violently arguing with people or smacking them upside the head for all the things that they got wrong. He usually said something very wise and went away.

In many cases, He stayed apart because it was not His time. He would tell people, "Do not spread this around. I have still got two years to go," or

whatever. And usually that did not work either because people said, "Look at me, I'm healed!" and told everybody. And then five thousand more people showed up.

But the idea here, I want to impress on you at least at this part of the sermon, is that we have been given a huge gift, a huge honor to be given peace by God. Christ's own peace comes upon us, and then we are responsible for, then, transmitting that peace then to others.

Let us go look at those benedictions that Paul uses where he writes about the God of peace. We are going to start in II Corinthians 13, verse 11. We are going to skip over the ones in Romans. They are rather simple. One describes how the God of peace is going to come down hard on Satan. The God of peace is going to judge Satan and remove him. But hey, that is a pretty big part of our having peace throughout the Kingdom of God, when Satan is finally overthrown and destroyed.

II Corinthians 13:11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. [Aha! That word again.] Be of good comfort [another good word], be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Very interesting. Keep those topics in your head as we go to the next one.

Philippians 4:8-9 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are good of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Some similar things there. Let us go on to I Thessalonians 5, verses 23 and 24.

I Thessalonians 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body

be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

Here we have these three benedictions where he mentions the God of peace. Did you catch the consistent theme? They all deal with spiritual maturity or completion. They have elements of doing right or doing good, doing noble things. Here in I Thessalonians, he mentions the word outright—sanctify. So he is talking about sanctification.

They are all part of the same process of growth. And he includes the concept of God giving us peace so that we can do these things. We have a guarantee, you can say, that if we are engaged in the process we are living at peace. Our minds and our actions are noble and good and worthy. We are doing godly things as often as possible, living godly lives, and seeking sanctification or seeking holiness.

In Hebrews it is pursuing holiness. If we do those things, the God of peace will be with you. That is comforting, is it not?

We must be engaged in that sanctification process because He has done all the background work for us. He has supplied all our needs. He has supplied everything that we need for Christian growth, for godliness.

And so if we engage, if we reciprocate upon His gifts with solid movement toward the Kingdom of God, toward doing what He wants us to do, He will be with us every step of the way. He is not going to go away from one of His children who is listening to Him and is receptive to what He says and is trying to do what is right, trying to please the Father, trying to do His will, and thus please Him.

And it says here in one of the three that we read, that if we do that, not only will He be with us, but He will preserve us for the first resurrection. Because we are at peace with Him and we are living peacefully and we are using, taking advantage of the environment to grow into the image of His Son.

Now let us take an even wider view of these benedictions. They describe a condition of unity with God. Oneness, wholeness. We have peace with God on a few different levels. We are actively behaving or growing, living in holiness in unison with Him. We are pursuing the same goal.

Like the image that we see in the peace offering under the covenant, we can say that we at that point are in intimate fellowship with God and our High Priest. And the relationship is free from any corrosive conflict or any cross purposes. We are all going the same way. We are all doing the same thing.

In Old Testament language, you know what this is? You know what I have just described? *Enoch walked with God. Noah walked with God. Abraham walked with God.* Insert your own name. If you are doing these things, if you are with the program, if you are taking advantage of all this, you are in unity with God. *You too are walking with God.* You are in step with Him in the process of making you fit for the Kingdom of God, equipping you for what you will need in the life to come.

And this condition, if we are walking with God, produces the third kind of peace: contentment and satisfaction that, with God, we are whole. We are complete and headed for eternal life in His Kingdom. We have an internal peace knowing that we are loved. We are provided for, we are protected, and we are guided by the sovereign God of the universe.

The big Man Himself, as it were, has got His eye on us, and He is with us every step of the way, providing everything that we need. And that, when we think about it, when we realize it, when we acknowledge it, brings us tranquility and joy. No matter what is going on around us, whether your house is falling down around your ears or not, you can have joy and tranquility because God is on the watch. He is right there with you. As Paul put it so plainly, God is with us.

Things could not be better, actually, because God is there. That is one of His names: God is there. And we have to believe that. That is why Abraham was able to take Isaac and to sacrifice him because he was aware that God was with him. That God would not do anything outside of His righteous character. He knew because he understood that God is sovereign and

almighty that He could bring Isaac back because all the promises had to go through the little boy or the young man. Young man, we will say young man, the "lad."

So Abraham could do something that other men looking from outside would consider foolish. But he knew: God is with me. This was going to end well, not poorly.

Let us go back to Philippians 4 and pick up from where we left off there. We will read 10 through 13 and then we will skip down to verses 18 through 20. We are going to go through a little bit of Paul's thinking here and his life to understand how this works a little bit.

Philippians 4:10-13 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. [They had sent him stuff while he was in prison.] Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Let us drop down to verse 18.

Philippians 4:18-20 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Right after telling the Philippians that the God of peace would be with them if they did what Paul taught them of the way of Christ, he turns then to his own example happening right at that time of how things work under this peace of God and what it produces.

He says it very clearly. I have *learned* in whatever state I am to be content. The peace of God and working with God produced contentment and internal peace.

Think about who we are talking about here. The apostle Paul. We will not go back to II Corinthians 11, where he lists all the perils that he had gone through. But though he suffered many horrible, terrible things, fatal perils, we think he was resurrected at least once, if not twice because God wanted him to finish his work, but those experiences, all those beatings and imprisonments and drowning, nearly, being so many times in the deep, without food, and on and on and on, those things had taught him that God was with him all the time.

Every minute, every second, whether his circumstance was pleasant or horrible, it did not matter. God was right there. God was *in* him. He did not need to fear that God had somehow gone away and forgotten about him. No, they were in step. Paul was walking with God.

And so God was there. If you walk with God, God has to be there, and He is. He is there all the time.

And he learned that with God by his side, even in the worst situation, he could be joyous. You wonder why James said that we can have joy in our trials. It is for this reason. Because God is there. He is working with us. He is helping us.

The trial is actually there for our good. We are to learn in that case, he says, patience, endurance. And that is part of all of this. We just have to endure those things that come upon us because God is working with us. God has a plan. He is working it out.

And so if God is in charge, the great Sovereign of the universe, let us sing a hymn. I mean, that is what he did in jail, right, in Philippi? He and Silas. "Hey, get up there and lead songs. We want to sing a hymn." They had joy in the midst of a very frightening circumstance. He and Silas could have been killed. But no, they made the best of it and sang. He could do this because Christ was there to strengthen him. And that is what he says here. "I can do

all things through Christ who strengthens me." He can endure any kind of problem, any kind of terrible thing, because Christ's strength is stronger than anything that man has to put up against him and he can be content.

He knew that Christ could give him what he needed at the right time in the right amount. He just had to wait. And as he said, we have to understand this, that this does not apply just to Paul or just to Abraham. He says, "My God shall supply all *your* need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." This is not just the greats of the Bible. This is a promise to each one of us, each one of God's elect.

So walk with Him. Trust Him and be at peace. Is that not something everybody wants?

This world is not at peace. And worse, I think, is that people are not at peace in themselves. This is the only true way to peace—through Christ.

Let us go back to Hebrews 13. I keep touching back on this because I think it is a very important short passage. (And by the way, Jared, the song that skipped on us was actually perfect for this particular point. This is what we did not sing on page 72. "Oh, come and let us worship Him. Let us bow down withal, and on our knees before the Lord our Maker let us fall. Because He only is our God, and we His people are, and of His pasture we are sheep, in His almighty care.")

Hebrews 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, . . .

I want the phrase, "that great Shepherd of the sheep." This is an integral part of this process, that Christ acts as Shepherd to us, His sheep. The Father is the God of peace. And the Son is the great Shepherd. They work hand-in-hand in the context of Christ's sacrifice and our calling and justification so that we might live for righteousness. Peter calls Him in I Peter 2:25, "the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls."

This is a very important role that He plays in our lives. And there is a linkage we see here in Hebrews 13:20 and the idea of the shepherd, the linkage between peace and Christ's function as shepherd.

As our shepherd He is responsible for our feeding, care, growth, successful completion or perfection or maturity, however you want to think of that process, and ultimately He is responsible for our entrance into God's Kingdom. He is responsible for the entire process of our sanctification, from the time God hands us over to Him after we are called all the way to the first resurrection and actually beyond because we are going to be His bride and He will care for us in the same way. But He is involved in every part of that process and working nonstop to make sure that He and we are successful and are complete, that we reach perfection, if you will.

Now, among our Shepherd's, or any shepherd's actually, top goal is to create an environment for the sheep to prosper and grow. And that environment is one of peace and contentment. One that is without fear, without conflict, without uncertainty. That is how you fatten a sheep up. You take it to a place where there is plenty of water, plenty of grass, no bugs (if you can do that, if you can find that place). No wolves. But they are content. In this country, we talk about contented cows being able to produce the best milk, but in this case we are talking about sheep. And it works the same way. When they are content, then they have the best chance of growing, of reaching maturity.

The Father and Son, then, are a one-two punch, we could say. The Father gives peace. And the Son gives His own peace to us and creates and maintains a condition or state of peace for us to produce contentment and well-being, which fosters growth toward wholeness and completion, or we could say, reaching back a couple of sermons, a state of *shalom*—a state of peace and prosperity and well-being that just cannot be beat.

Unfortunately, what I have said up to now as part of this one-two punch leaves us out of the picture. But now let us put us into the picture, and things are not as rosy because we tend to be the weak link in all of this. We often resist Him in His efforts. We undermine His work with our fears, with our faithlessness, with our humanness, our human nature, our wanting to let our senses take the reins of things, with our pettiness about certain things, with

our short-sightedness. That is a big one. We just do not see what is going on out beyond the tip of our nose and we cannot see how the things that we are going through are going to help us be more like Christ and so we veer off. And we are no longer walking with Christ because of something in us that did not like what we were faced with.

But if we just stick with the program and walk with God, things would be well. The Father and the Son do everything for our benefit. They are not trying to trip us up. They are not trying to smash us down. They do not want to make us grease spots out on the road. They want to help us. Everything that They do is pointed toward getting us to the Kingdom.

But we forestall the process so often because we are weak. And that is a shame. We all do it. It is a part of being human that are so short-sighted and unable to recognize the good in what has come upon us.

But that is something we have to work through. We have to be constantly evaluating ourselves and how we are walking with Christ. Not just before Passover, but all the time, all through the year, because we want to stay on the straight and narrow. We want to walk with God.

Let us go to John 10. This is the chapter where Christ reveals Himself as the great Shepherd or the Good Shepherd, as He calls Himself here. We are going to read a bit, not do too much comment, but I want you to notice what He does.

John 10:1-4 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."

John 10:7-16 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and

out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep, but he who is a hireling, and not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd."

John 10:27-30 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."

Now Jesus here provides us a taste of what His job as the great Shepherd entails. He leads them, protects them, maintains their lives with feeding and care, and not just maintains their lives but provides for them so much that they end up living abundant lives—more than they need for life, with a lot of extras too.

He knows each one personally, and they know Him. It is a special relationship, intimate and personal. And we find here too that He is a unifier of sheep and flocks, drawing them into one flock like He and the Father are one. And ultimately, He gives them eternal life.

Knowing what you just heard, should you not as one of His sheep be content? At peace, at rest.

I have a sneaking suspicion that the peace that He wants us to develop is a precursor of God's rest that we will have fully in His Kingdom. He wants us to have a taste of His rest, and we can have it if we walk at peace with Him.

Let us go to Psalm 23. This psalm just took a great leap in my mind going through this series I have done on peace because this is what David is talking about, this third kind of peace, this contentment, this feeling of wholeness and completeness, and having boundless satisfaction with his life.

We need to read this with that in mind, with the optimism of joy and hope and faith and love. And I think that is how he wrote it. He writes as a sheep, content, at peace, and whole. And he is that way because the Lord is his shepherd. I will try to read it like this.

Psalm 23:1-6 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

He was happy. He loved his life as a sheep of the Lord. He was content because God was with him.

You can see that in coming to know the Lord that David felt he had an ironclad guarantee that the abundant life and eternal life are his if he just follows the Lord, his Shepherd. Whatever happened, God would work it out.

Let us finish in Numbers 6. I want you all to sing along with me. This is how we end our Feast of Tabernacles here in Church of the Great God, with the blessing of the priests over the people of Israel. Listen to what it says. I mean, we hear it and we are moved at the end of the Feast, but really listen to what God wants to give us. Verse 22.

Numbers 6:22-27 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them [they are communicating from Him to the people, they are telling the people what God wants for them]:

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.'" "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

"I *will* bless them." And that bears repeating. "The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace."