

## **SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT**

I Peter 3: 10-12, Mark 4:35-41, and Hebrews 12:14-17

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While Pastor Bob Deffinbaugh was at Dallas Theological Seminary, long before becoming a pastor at Community Bible Chapel in Richardson, Texas, Dr. Henry Morris, co-author of the great book, “The Genesis Flood,” came to speak to the entire student body in the seminary chapel. Dr. Morris told the true story of a young pilot named Tom (now Tom is with Missionary Aviation Fellowship). Tom was flying at 30,000 feet when his plane exploded. All those in the plane were killed instantly except Tom. Tom able to jump out of the plane. He was plummeting to the earth, pulling the rip cord, but his chute failed to open. At the last minute, the chute did open, but when it opened, it was in shreds, barely breaking the speed of his fall. Meanwhile, down below, a Christian lady was standing in her driveway seeing the plane explode, and she was watching the whole horrifying scene. Knowing the man was in desperate trouble, the woman prayed for his safe descent. Tom, needless to say, was praying desperately, too. Tom landed in a miraculous way, safely, virtually at the feet of this praying woman. Looking up, they saw that the ropes of his parachute had caught in two of her trees right in front of her house, breaking his fall and lowering him gently to the ground. Definitely, in many of our lives right now, at breakneck speed, many of us have situations that are out of control, careening toward a terrible wreck. As one of your shepherds, I am praying for God to intervene and work miracles in many of our lives. If I had all of you stand right now who are facing desperate situations in your lives, we might be surprised to see more of us standing than sitting. These are desperate days in America, and the enemy is deeply at work, doing everything he can possibly do to steal the peace of believers, churches, families, marriages, and attempting to throw us into a panic mode. As we come to this message, there are 3 parts to this message. First, look with me at what it means to seek peace and pursue it, from I Peter 3: 10-12, and then follow this up with two passages, illustrating first seeking peace, in Mark 4: 35-41, and then in pursuing peace in Hebrews 12: 14-17. Let’s look at the meaning of seeking peace and pursuing it, and then explore in two illustrations, what it means, secondly, to seek peace, and thirdly, to pursue peace. Let’s study these 3 questions.

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT?** (I.) This quote from Peter in I Peter 3: 11, first was penned under divine inspiration by David in Psalm 34: 11-14, where David said, “Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” As David turns for a moment in Psalm 34, from poet to teacher and preacher, his major point is that he is calling for us to live in the fear of the Lord. If we desire life, good things, if we desire to live many days, the answer is to fear the Lord—keeping our tongues from evil and our lips from speaking deceit, turning away from evil and doing good, seeking peace and pursuing it. What is David talking about, and why is Peter quoting him? All through the New Testament, there rings

this plea for Christian unity. It is even more than a plea. It is an announcement that the Christian cannot live the Christian life unless in his personal relationships, he is at unity with his brothers and sisters, whether it is in the body of Christ, or in our families, or in our marriages. We cannot speak of the church as our Christian church if there are divisions among us. We cannot speak of our marriages as Christian marriages, if there are divisions in them. The New Testament never treats this agreeing in Christ as a spiritual luxury for a few elite folks, but as an essential to our true reality of being a Christian church or having a Christian marriage. Allowing divisions to remain and being unwilling to love, to speak love, to unite, and to remain together in unity means we are calling in question the truth of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The more seriously we take the Word of God, the more urgent and painful becomes our sense of the sinfulness of dividing, fostering divisions, welcoming them, or justifying what the Gospel forbids in the Christian church and in Christian marriages.

As Paul fleshes out what the Gospel is in Ephesians 2: 14-16, he is dead in earnest saying, “For He (Jesus) Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility...so making peace that He might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross.” We must not only sing the truth, but live the truth David and Peter are speaking of. “He is our peace, who has broken down every wall, He is our peace. (2X) Cast all your care on Him, for He cares for you, He is our peace. He is our peace.” Now secondly, let’s apply this truth in a biblical illustration to explain seeking peace.

**HOW DOES THE WORD OF GOD ILLUSTRATE SEEKING AND RECEIVING PEACE?** (II.) Let’s go to our text in Mark 4: 35-41. The scene I will read again as it shows the setting of Jesus calming a storm. There are spiritual storms and there are physical storms. Isn’t it interesting that the disciples were terrified in the boat, even though Jesus was in the boat with them? They were scared to death. Fear can do that in our individual lives, in our families, in our marriages, and in our churches. The older we are here today, the more we are prone to being fearful, as our fears grow and expand over time. The recent shootings in Uvalde, Texas, frighten us all. Yet, these disciples were not alone. They were with Jesus. They had seen Him perform many miracles, but they could panic right along with the best of us. That night they piled into a boat after a long day of teaching and preaching, big crowds, lots of questions, the most dangerous time to be on the water, is when a windstorm hits, whether it’s on the Flaming Gorge or on the Sea of Galilee. Waves beat into the boat, Mark 4: 17. The boat was already filling with water, with water perhaps already up to their ankles. This was serious. Four of these disciples were professional fishermen. They had seen storms on the Sea of Galilee, but this one was worse, and they were frightened for their lives. They had **phobos**-fear, from the Greek word, **phobeo**. Our English word phobia comes from this root – and phobeo means anxiety, panic, dread. Fear of dying or fear of disaster, and fear of what we know and do not know.

Perhaps it sounds to you like June 26, 2022. How many of us have anxiety, fear, dread, and even panic this morning? What did the disciples do? Jesus was in the

boat with them, but He was sleeping in the stern of the ship, the back of the boat where He was asleep on a cushion. Jesus was exhausted as they were, from ministry, pouring out all day long. This is when the yelling started, “Master, wake up, don’t you know that we are ankle deep in water and our boat is going down?” Though Jesus was in their boat, the disciples were asking, “Are you really here now, in this scary situation?” This was desperation fear, and we’ve all been there, or we are there today. What did Jesus do? He woke up and He rebuked the wind and told the sea to calm down. His words were, “Peace, Be still!” Soon the situation was in control again. The storm was over, their knees were knocking, and it was time to bail water out of the boat. The sea was placid, calm, like a mirror in the moonlight. There was a great calm we read. Then Jesus asked the disciples a very perceptive question. “Why are you so afraid?” Have you still no faith?”

This calm sea they were floating on, combined with Jesus’ words, worked the disciples up. What a strange question to ask them after they had nearly drowned. They had all nearly drowned and perished. Now strangely, a great fear in the calm swept over their souls, a greater fear than their fear in the storm. What was this new fear? They said to each other, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” What was this fear that stole over them? They had forgotten who it was who was in the boat with them. In fact, who was this, that even the wind and the sea obeyed Him? Having Jesus in the boat with us on board, ready to stop the storm we are in, is incomprehensible. What else can He do? He can do anything, so much more than stop a raging storm. Are you afraid this morning? Are you petrified over what’s happening in your life, your family, our church, or your marriage? Do you believe God is in the boat with you? Do you believe God can give us peace, no matter what problems we face today? Jesus is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46: 1) I guarantee, some of us are in some fixes, some of our own doing, and some that have just blown up like the storm on the Sea of Galilee, storms we haven’t counted on. Are you praying we me right to the same Lord Jesus who is in your boat too? Now thirdly, and lastly, let’s apply this truth in a biblical illustration to explain pursuing peace.

### **HOW DOES THE WORD OF GOD ILLUSTRATE PURSUING PEACE AND WHAT HAPPENS IF WE REFUSE TO PURSUE PEACE?** (III.)

Listen to the writer of Hebrews 12: 14-17 and hear the Word of the Lord in this third and final text. We read, “Strive for peace with everyone, (or pursue peace) and for the holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.” “Pursuing” is a theme in the Bible often repeated, either in the sense of our pursuing of God or of God pursuing us. In Psalm 34: 14, we read, “Depart from evil, and do good. Seek peace, and pursue it.” In Psalm 23: 6, God is pursuing us. We read, “Surely goodness and loving kindness/mercy will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” In Romans 14: 19, Paul declares, “So then let us pursue the things which

make for peace and the building up of one another.” The word press toward the mark in Philippians 3: 12, 14 carries the same pursue idea. “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus...I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Seek after means the same as pursue in I Thessalonians 5: 15. “See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.” The Greek word **dioko** means to pursue without hostility, or to follow after. In I Timothy 6: 11, Paul adds, “But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue (dioko) righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.”

Let’s take time to read Esau’s story. Turn with me to Genesis 25: 29-34. “Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!” (Therefore, his name was called Edom) Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright now.” Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” Jacob said, “Swear to me now.” So, he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus, Esau despised his birthright.” Now hear what happened! Look with me at the story. Esau had become a man who put the needs of his body first, who put the pleasures and passions of the moment first. That’s why he quickly sold his birthright to fill his stomach. By selling his birthright for a pot of beans, a morsel of meat, lentil soup, or a mess of pottage, Esau revealed his inner character as a man who did not possess God in his life. Listen to Genesis 27: 1-41.

When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.” He said, “Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver, and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me, and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.” Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So, when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, ‘Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the LORD before I die.’ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you. Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves. And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.” But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing.” His mother said to him, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me.” So, he went and took them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared delicious food, such as his father loved. Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And the skins of the young goats she put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. And she put the delicious food and the

bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. So, he went in to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me."

But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the LORD your God granted me success." Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." So, Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So, he blessed him. He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." Then he said, "Bring it near to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So, he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." So, he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed! May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!"

As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. He also prepared delicious food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." <sup>32</sup> His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." Then Isaac trembled very violently and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed." As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing." Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Behold, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?" Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. Then, Isaac his father answered and said to him: "Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you grow restless you shall break his yoke from your neck." Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

Notice that Esau was not repenting. No, the picture rather was that he found no way to change his father's mind about giving him the blessing since it had already been given to Jacob. The repentance which Esau did not find was not a change of his own mind, for he never sought for that change. What Esau could not find was a change in his father Isaac's mind. Esau begged for the blessing, seeking it with tears. In short, up to this time, Esau had been a purely secular man, a man devoid of spiritual values. Spiritual things were insignificant to him up to the time of the coming of the blessing. When Esau realized what he had done, it was too late to recover what he had spurned for years. The tears with which Esau begged his father Isaac were not enough to reclaim the birthright he had once glibly sold for those pinto or red beans he wanted when he was hungry. Notice, that in all Esau's begging of Isaac, his father, he was never once repentant of having sold his birthright to his brother. Truly the day did come when he deeply desired the blessing he had once despised, but the hour was past for him to find his way to true repentance of his awful deal of selling Jacob his birthright. There are two worlds before us in this life, the world we can clearly see, and the world to come. Beloved, there is good reason we sing, "Take this world but give me Jesus." When we throw away eternity and mock its value, we sell our birthright for a mess of pottage.

Beloved, never, never, never sacrifice the future on the altar of the immediate. Are you doing that today, failing to look beyond today?

There is a time, when as in the days of Noah, the door is shut, and it will never be reopened if we have been an unbelieving Esau. Remember verse 14, that the highway of peace is also the highway of holiness. Outside that highway, no one will see the Lord. Any false peace that we have can easily be distinguished from the peace that Jesus brings, because false peace is not accompanied by holiness and sanctification. Notice in verse 15, that grace is the motive for walking in a straight path, and for pursuing peace and holiness. This grace of God is what we fall on for our own forgiveness. Only God can give us forgiveness by His grace when we truly repent. Any other way we take is short of the grace of God as was the way Esau took, v. 15. Remember in Hebrews 12: 14 that without holiness or purity of heart, no one will see the Lord. Jesus Himself said in the beatitudes in Matthew 5: 8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Included in the grace of God are His injunctions to pursue peace and holiness. Dear Lord, I pray we all will never forget this strong warning in Your Word." May we seek peace and pursue it, run after it, so like Esau, when we weep, it won't be forever too late.