

Peace When There Is No Peace (Ezekiel 13:8-16)

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[0 : 0 0] Today's reading is from Ezekiel, chapter 13. I'll be reading from verse 1 through to 16. Hear the word of the Lord.

The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination, hear the word of the Lord.

This is what the sovereign Lord says. Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing. Your prophets, O Israel, are like jackals among ruins.

You have not gone up to the breaks in the wall to repair it for the house of Israel so that it will stand firm in the battle on the day of the Lord. Their visions are false and their divinations are lie.

They say the Lord declares when the Lord has not sent them, and yet they expect their words to be fulfilled. Have you not seen false visions and uttered lying divinations when you say, The Lord declares that I have not spoken?

[1 : 1 6] Therefore, this is what the sovereign Lord says. Because of your false words and lying visions, I'm against you, declares the sovereign Lord. My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations.

They will not belong to the counsel of my people or be listed in the records of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the sovereign Lord.

Because they lead my people astray, saying, Peace, when there is no peace. And because when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash.

Therefore, tell those who cover it with whitewash that it's going to fall. Rain will come and torrents, and I will send hailstones hurtling down, and violent winds will burst forth.

When the wall collapses, will people not ask you, Where is the whitewash you covered it with? Therefore, this is what the sovereign Lord says.

[2 : 2 4] In my wrath I will unleash a violent wind, and in my anger hailstones and torrents of rain will fall with destructive fury. I will tear down the wall you have covered with whitewash, and will level it to the ground, so that its foundations will be laid bare.

When it falls, you will be destroyed in it, and you will know that I am the Lord. So will I spend my wrath against the wall, and against those who covered it with whitewash.

I'll say to you, the wall is gone, and so are those who whitewashed it, those prophets of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her when there was no peace, declares the sovereign Lord.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, good afternoon again, and lovely to spend this time together with you all, and I really hope that many of you will come and say hi afterwards so we can get to know each other properly, because obviously we were interviewed, but I can't interview you guys.

I can't get to know you guys on a personal level. So I hope you guys will come and chat with us. But yeah, we're looking at Ezekiel 13, and it's a pretty interesting passage. I'll probably wager many of you have never read it before.

[3 : 39] It's in a place in the Old Testament that's quite, you know, it's not something that you read commonly. You might say a bit obscure, hidden in the Old Testament, but I believe it is very relevant for all of us, and indeed it's something that we can already immediately see.

It's not just relegated to those times where Ezekiel lived. It's something that's true even in our day. But with all that said, let us bow our heads and ask the Lord for blessing as we come to his word.

Well, Lord, we thank you so much for your grace and giving us this time together, and we thank you especially now for your word. Would you be with us now, Lord, and speak to us so that through your word we would all come to know you more intimately, we would come into a real and true relationship with you through your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So speak to us now. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, you know, I said that I think this is very relevant for all of us, and you'll see exactly why, but you can see even here the prophet Ezekiel, he's prophesying, right?

He's bringing a word from the Lord to the people of Israel and Jerusalem. And here there's used this analogy, this talk of a flimsy wall and plastering it with whitewash, covering it up.

[4 : 47] And I think that's something we can relate to a lot because it reminds me of what I see every day. You guys know if you live in Auckland, I assume all of us do, you'll know that housing developments and housing prices is what people talk about all the time.

In fact, for a lot of young people, that might be what you stress about every night. How are you going to get a house? And how are you going to pay your mortgage and get your rent and all that kind of stuff? And, you know, it's something that's really in my face, in our face all the time, because on our street, there are five plots of housing developments, just in our little section of the street.

And we happen to be sandwiched in the middle of two. So on either side, left and right, there are six new houses, so 12 altogether. We've got a lot of new neighbors to get to meet. And, you know, as you watch it go up, you know, kind of day by day, it's quite interesting to watch, but obviously very busy, and the streets are always blocked, people are doing road works and all that kind of stuff.

But it reminded me of something I read about, which, you know, when you hear about it, you'll think, oh, that's not a surprise, but you'll feel really uncomfortable at how awful human nature is. You know, you read about people who have been found out and discovered, because, you know, if you build a house properly, you're going to get council consent, you want to make sure it's all ticked off and approved.

So at every stage, you would have somebody from the Auckland Council to come and test and make sure that the building is up to the building code. But, you know, there's a practice that was found where people would have the inspector come, and then as soon as they approve it, rip out whatever quality material they built it with and put in the cheaper stuff.

[6 : 13] And they would kind of maybe carve out whatever is underneath to make sure they could save that money for the next project and replace it with cheaper materials that wouldn't pass the building code. And, you know, it reports, obviously, those who have been found out and discovered, but you kind of really have to kind of ask how many have gotten away with it.

But you kind of hear and think, well, you totally get that's human nature, but it's pretty awful to do, isn't it? And that right there is exactly what Ezekiel is talking about with this illustration that he uses, that God gives to him to pass on to the people.

Just think about if you were trying to buy a house and you went into it just thinking the house looks wonderful on the outside, beautifully painted, everything's really nicely put together, so it must be a great place, and you buy it blindly.

I think anybody who would kind of care for you and maybe want you to think more seriously would ask you, you've got to do your homework before you just go in and buy the house because it looks nice on the outside. Make sure you get a building report done and make sure you look at the limb and look at all the council records and investigate whether or not the house itself is sound within and its foundations and its timbers and all that kind of jazz without just being dazzled by the outward appearance.

I think we all can relate to that very, very simply, can't we? That it's one thing for something to look wonderful and look so nice and solid, but we care about the reality, especially because if you're buying the house, you're sinking your money into it and you're actually putting your life under that roof.

[7 : 38] And if the pillars are not sound, it's going to be your head that the timbers fall down upon. I think we all understand that concept, and that's true in every area of life. If somebody was going to give you a ride here to church, for example, you would probably be looking at the driver and if they looked like they were drunk out of their mind, you would probably not get in the car.

You know, you don't care if the car looks nice on the outside, if inwardly the driver is not in a sound mind. This principle we understand, don't we? It's common sense. And here's exactly what Ezekiel is saying and he's applying it spiritually.

There are these false prophets in those days who would preach a message that sounded so wonderful, so easy to receive and believe. It appeals to the population, but there's only one problem with it, and it's the biggest problem.

It's that it's a false message. It's not from God. It's not what God gave them to say, and God certainly didn't clear and give them the authority to go and preach it.

Even though, you know, we can kind of guess back in the end, they would have been very popular and well received. They probably were the majority. In fact, if you know anything of the historical context, here with Ezekiel, he was prophesying and his ministry was right before the great fall of Jerusalem, when the Babylonians came and destroyed them in one and carried them off as slaves to their own land for over seven decades.

[9 : 02] And all of that, God had been prophesying through his servants, the prophets, time and again, as the righteous response to them continuing to not listen to God until he's going to take them out of the land.

Now, that's a message that people don't want to hear. You can read about it in Jerusalem. I'm sorry, in Jeremiah. That poor guy didn't receive a good hearing at all. He got thrown into ditches. He got beaten.

People hated him and what he had to say. Because here he was preaching that God will visit you and punish you for all the ways you've not listened to him. That's not a message that people want to hear, naturally speaking.

And yet here are these false prophets. Many hundreds of them we read, and they preach peace. They preach all will be well. They preach that God will not bring judgment upon us. And that's a message that is very easily received.

But you see why this illustration of the wall that's flimsy in a plaster is used. Because so what if something sounds wonderful? If something appeals to us naturally?

[10 : 03] If it is not truly from God. It is something that does not accord with reality. And of course, certainly we know the God who made all things is the definition of reality.

And that's the context that Ezekiel is prophesying. There are these many prophets who cry out peace when there is no peace. You can see that mentioned twice in this passage we read.

Verse 10 and verse 16. Peace when there is no peace. And I mentioned to you right at the start that this is very relevant for all of us because I think the situation has not changed at all spiritually speaking.

Now, we're not living in Jerusalem. There's no foreign city. Sorry, no foreign army that's besieging our city seeking to break us and take us away into slavery. Certainly that's true. But you know, all of those things in the Old Testament are spiritual examples, aren't they?

Of really what's going on. The question we have to ask now is, well, is there all these messages that promise peace and are they actually substantiated with reality underneath?

[11 : 07] Because I do think we live in an age where there are many, many, many gospels of peace that are being thrown around that are calling for your attention and your trust.

And the question we have to ask in examining all of them is, are they actually real peace? Is this real satisfaction that we have to think about? And you know, even there, you know, the Hebrew way when they use that word shalom that we translate as peace, they mean not just merely the absence of conflict, but everything that a person needs.

That's when they have peace, the full satisfaction of their being. Now, when we come to this, we might even think, we start from the outside and work our way in. You know, you might ask, are there messages and supposedly, you know, if we use that word figuratively, prophets who preach peace outside the church, far away, out there in the world?

Well, I think you'll find that that's something that we see all around us. You know, in those days, perhaps, people in Jerusalem would say, peace is if we can get the Egyptians to come and help us.

If we can get the political and military power, then everything will go well with us. And we see that a lot today. I don't know if you notice it. There'll be people saying, if only this political party could be in power, our life would be better.

[12 : 22] If only this politician could become prime minister, then everything would be well. I mean, maybe not so much in New Zealand, but you see it across in America more. But there is this tendency for us to look to political power in order to satisfy what we truly need.

We look to that, perhaps. Or those who would look to just the more materialistic aspects of life. If only I could have more money and a greater career, then I would have the full satisfaction of my being.

I would not need anything. You might say, well, that's a pretty shallow way to live. But there are many who live in that way. I wonder if that's true of you. You would give whatever it is in your life that's going to take in order to get a promotion at work.

You're willing to sacrifice whatever it is that you have to sacrifice in order to earn more money and to save up more for retirement. And I'd say, you know, this is an English congregation of a Chinese church, but the Chinese culture emphasizes materials over all things because it's a culture without spirituality.

So there is nothing beyond the things of this world. And so we hear this message over and over that you as a human being would have everything you need if only you had more cash to spend and more things that you could grab for yourself.

[13 : 37] But you might say, well, that's not me. That's too shallow. No, I'm more deep than that. I crave human relationships. What does sound more wonderful, but even still, is that enough to satisfy the heart of a human being made in the image of God?

If somebody were to say, if only I could find the perfect partner for me, Mr. Right or Mrs. Right. That's what I need most of all. I need a husband or a wife. And it sounds humorous.

You know, we might laugh and poke another person, our friend with elbows. And yet that is exactly what message we hear. That we need to find romance. That we need to find this which stirs up our emotional feelings and makes us feel good about ourselves.

That's what I need as a human being above all else. I need a happy family and happy kids and a happy wife. And that's what I need most of all. And there are these many messages because you can look around at this world and see that's exactly what people live for.

And all of these promises are promises of peace. If you have ears to hear. They are claiming that if you believe what they have to say and seek after these things, whatever they may be, then you will have all that you need and your life will be secure.

[14 : 50] And we have to just simply step back and ask, is that true peace? Is that real? Because in all of these matters, all these elements of truth in that they are good and wonderful things to these things with family and work and money.

They can be used for great good and they are gifts from God. But are they to be the ultimate thing that we rest our lives on and look to for peace? We must conclude, no.

Because they do not deal with ultimate reality. There's no reference to God, is there? So people might very well spend their whole lives looking to family, looking to their romance, looking to the pleasures they can have in this life.

This is why so many of the things that sell today are of a physical nature, immoral nature, because that's what people look to and cry out to in order to receive the joy that they think that they're going to get from them.

But they don't deal with God. And very easily, you can see why they would be messages which are not true because they can't deal with the coming reality of death. You might have the best family that you can imagine, happiness all around.

[15 : 58] You might have the best job and the greatest income, and yet all of it will be cut short by this horrible thing that is called death. And when you face death and face the reality of meeting God who made you, where will all these things help you on that great day?

You know, our Lord Jesus spoke much about those who put their hopes on riches and on the things that they had. And He said that they were fools to do so because they did not make themselves rich with God, but rather they were rich only in this world.

So that's out there, isn't it? That's what the world has to say. Those are the messages and the preachers that we come across with. And even there, we have to stop and ask ourselves, have we been deceived to live for those things?

And if so, I would ask you to think very seriously on whether or not there's true peace to be had with those messages. When we come closer to the church, we might say, well, look, you know, we know that God exists.

We know that He is holy and that we need to be accepted by Him. We need to be in a right relationship with Him. He's the fountain of life. He's the spring of living waters. And if I don't have a relationship with Him, then it doesn't matter what else we have.

[17 : 08] All of which are true things, aren't they? But is it possible to be in the church, to be in the holy city Jerusalem, to be part of God's people in an outward visible sense, and yet to not be right with God?

Absolutely. And that is a frightening reality. And we have to ask, what are the false prophets that we might meet with in our day in the church? What are the false messages that we might meet with?

And we might very well hear things such as, oh, yeah, you need to be right with God, and here's the way to get it. Come to church and tick off the list of all the things you need to do. Fill out your religious observances.

If you are in church every Sunday, then God is happy with you. You know, there is this focus on what you must do, what you have to do in your life, and what you have to give, and the obedience that you offer to God.

It is that which makes you right with Him. In other words, if we use the language that the Bible describes, it's what the Apostle Paul calls works of the law. It is those who seek to be right with God on their own standing, by their own merit, saying, Lord, here's some of the things you command me to do, and I've done them.

[18 : 17] But all of that shows a superficial understanding of God's law. It shows only a human understanding of what is required of us because, here's the thing, when a person comes to God and says, Lord, I can meet your standards by my efforts.

They are dragging God's character down to their level. That's what they're saying. God, your perfection and your standard and your character is at the level of my performance.

And if you know anything about God and how He reveals Himself in the Scriptures, we ought to know in our merits and what we can do, there's no way that we can live up to God's perfect standard.

For all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. And yet, in the church, there are many who think that the way to peace with God, they've got that right. We need peace with God.

But they think the way to it is through what they do. It's through the things that they can take off. They might even well think, as we've seen today with people who are serving, I'm serving in the church.

[19 : 20] If anyone's right with God, it's me. Yeah, there are those people who come to church, but, you know, I'm not like them. I'm more spiritual because I serve and I do things for the church.

But that's not what you'll find in the Scriptures. It's not a peace that will last because in the end, if you're really honest with God's character and His perfection, you'll see that you don't match up.

In fact, people only think that when they do not see God clearly. And I would say they don't see themselves clearly. They brush over their sins and they brush over how serious it is and they diminish how perfect and how pure God truly is.

That's the only way you could think for a second that what you do could make God accept you on its own merits. But that's something that we do find in the church, isn't it?

We find there are people who are misled in that way. And you see, actually, what Ezekiel was prophesying against is not so far away from us at all. There are scores of people who think that they are right with God because of what they do.

[20 : 28] It's a sad reality and it's because they do not know what God actually has to say. We've considered some of these ways of false peace, these false lying messages that people may have listened to.

And I would hope every one of you would think seriously about whether or not you have believed and been misled by these lying tongues. But we have to ask, is there true peace to be had?

And I think the answer is very clear. It is to Christ that we must go to. As you know, the Scriptures testify to us that it is in Christ that God reconciled the world to Himself.

You can find that in Colossians chapter 1. And Paul makes a little interesting phrase. What did God do in Christ? Making peace by the blood of His cross. That's what Christ was doing on the cross.

That's why He came into this world. He came to die. Not because He deserved it, but because He was standing in the place of those who deserve to die. As it is written, Galatians 3, He became a curse to redeem us from the curse of the law.

[21 : 35] That's the reason why He was on the cross. And you see how the message of the cross comes and obliterates all of these other messages of supposed peace with God. Supposed sources of satisfaction for us.

Because Christ comes and says, this is the only way through me. Can you conceive of the possibility of God sending His own beloved Son with whom He had perfect eternal fellowship for all eternity?

Him who He says, in Him I am well pleased. Can you conceive of God sending His Son to the cross to be treated as a sinner and to be crushed by His justice if it was not necessary?

If it was only one way among many for people to approach God? Paul says in Galatians 2, 21, that if righteousness could be had through works of the law, then Christ died in vain.

See, the cross comes and shatters all these other claims. And it declares with no embarrassment, the reason why Christ died in the place of sinners is because that's the only way for those who are separated from God to be brought near to Him.

[22 : 47] That is how serious sin is. That is how serious our separation from God is. That it took the death of God's own Son for a way to be made to be right with Him.

and it is that which confronts every other supposed peace and says that there are no peace at all. They might give you some satisfaction or momentary pleasure here in this life, but here is a true peace which lasts for all eternity.

It is a peace which is grounded upon Christ Himself. He makes a full sacrifice for sins. And I love the way the writer of Hebrews puts it in his letter in the New Testament. He says, the Old Testament priests, they would make sacrifices of the animals, but they had to do it every day because it wasn't enough.

But here, Christ offers Himself once for all and there's no more sacrifices ever because it's done. That's what He says. When Christ made a sacrifice for Himself once for all, He rose and sat down at the right hand of God the Father.

You know why people sit down, right? It's because they don't have work to do. You finish a long hard day of work, you go home to sit down because you're done. And the Lord Jesus Christ, He is so worthy and so valuable that when He made sacrifice of Himself as an offering, one time, it is enough.

[24 : 04] And so the message of God is that in Christ, here is true peace with God. Here is the full forgiveness of all of our sins which would hold us back from communion and fellowship with the pure and holy God.

It is laid upon Christ. And the righteousness that we need to be accepted by God because He cannot accept anything less than perfection. Where is it to be found? It's not to be found in what you can do but to be found entirely upon Christ Jesus Himself.

His full perfection. And so we see that phrase used in the New Testament. God reconciling all things to Himself through Christ making peace by the blood of His cross.

It's a simple message in fact but I think it's a very relevant one because all of you have to ask seriously what is it that you are resting upon for true peace?

That which we know we need we hunger for it as human beings. We want satisfaction. We want something to fill us and to assure us that everything will be well. And I marvel as I look out across this world and see the things which people say.

[25 : 11] And especially you'll see this. People will be tested when their lives are faced with storms and floods and troubles. that's when it's revealed what they are truly relying upon.

And you see perhaps that many people they have nothing less than just a shallow trite cliché. Everything will turn out well. How do you know that? Aren't we to ask whether or not the peace that we rely on has any solid ground that we're going to stand on?

Otherwise when we come before the greatest flood of all which is death and meeting God face to face how can you be sure that it will go well with you? That is a question which the Bible presents for every single person to think about seriously.

And the answer is if you are resting not upon Jesus and His death and resurrection then God testifies in His word that there is no true peace with you. Because you will not be able to stand that day of judgment.

That's what we read here don't we? Ezekiel talks about that flood that will come. And when you look around that's what people say everything will be alright. And yet there is no basis for such claims.

[26 : 19] They are but empty comforts. And I would think none of us would want to live our lives facing the difficulties which must come to every soul and especially death.

Just resting on an empty cliché. Just resting on something that sounds nice but has no basis. But for the one who is in the Lord Jesus Christ through faith they have put their trust in Him.

They know that His death has procured forgiveness with God. When somebody asks them even as they face tragedies which would swallow others in grief and they say how do you know all things will be well with you?

Because Christ has died for me. The Father He loves me. I know it because He has promised that all those who receive His Son the Lord Jesus Christ He calls them His children.

Here is solid ground that I can stand on. How do you know all will be well with you? That death is just a river to pass through to eternal life because that is exactly what Christ said that He will do.

[27 : 18] Whoever comes to me I will never cast out and I will raise them up on the last day. You can stand on a rock solid ground. In fact it's what our Lord said right there at the end of Matthew 7 the Sermon on the Mount.

He talks about two people. He says there are those who hear His words and they did not do it. And He says that is like a man who built his house upon the sand.

And there's another and He heard His words and did them. And He says that is a man who built his house on solid rock. And this is a song we teach the kids.

You know your Sunday school might have it. Jesus says the rain came down and the floods came up. What happened? Two houses same floods same conditions one fell with a great ruin and one stood.

Why? Because of the workmanship? No. We read that the house was built probably in exactly the same code exactly same council regulation but the problem started from the very beginning.

[28 : 19] The foundations were different. And Christ says the man who listens to my words and does not do them is a man who has built his whole life upon sand.

I would ask every one of you to think seriously. What is your life built upon? What is your security built on? Where is your peace to be found? Is it found upon Christ what he has said and what he has declared?

Have you listened to his words not only in an intellectual sense you're here at church you're understanding the words and the meaning but have you gone and done them namely to put your trust in him and to follow him?

Only then do you have any assurance from God that your life is built on solid ground. But I must say if you are thinking about that question and you cannot answer with a clear conscience that your life and your security is built upon Christ and what he has done then you do not yet have peace from God.

In fact I would say right here God is calling you to him. God is inviting you to think about how shaky the ground your life is built on is currently if it is something other than Christ.

[29 : 29] Will it be able to stand when the floods comes up and the rain comes down because the fact is every person will have to go through these realities and where there is only safety to be found in Christ.

So something simple but I hope God will help every one of you to think seriously on these questions. Let's pray. Lord we thank you so much for this passage and Lord we do confess it is such a clear and yet challenging passage.

Lord we ask that you help every one of us to think seriously about these questions and these matters that you would lead us to the Lord Jesus Christ the solid rock in whom we find peace with you for all eternity.

Help us to draw near to you in his name. We pray this in Jesus name now. Amen.