

# Serving the Lord in Times of Peace

Acts 9:31

*Halifax: 1 April 2012*

## Introduction

In the early chapters of Acts, we have seen how the Lord gives us a portrait of the church—the way it ought to be.

- It is a pattern for all subsequent generations...

We have seen the church...

- continuing steadfastly in worship
- selling possessions to give
- solving problems with wisdom

We have seen the church's faithful example under persecution...

- boldly testifying of Christ despite persecution
- rejoicing to be counted worthy to suffer
- praying for enemies

Recently, we have seen a very severe persecution...

- violent
- initiated by one man
- But the disciples remained faithful
  - those who stayed...
  - those who fled...

But now this violent persecution has been quelled!

- The verse we are looking at today informs us that peace has come!
  - **(Act 9:31) Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.**
- This speaks of the time of peace that took place in AD 36-37...
  - due Saul's conversion
  - due to Saul's escape to Tarsus (he was a target that drew persecution)
  - due to political changes
    - Vitellius replaces Pilate (AD 36)
      - he promoted order and stability (unlike Pilate)
      - he deposed Caiaphas (the high priest)

So now the church faces the challenge of a season of peace!

- Yes, I said "*challenge*"...
  - Peace is often more difficult for us to handle well than persecution.
  - "When you have eaten and are full, then beware... lest you forget the Lord..."

- The church had experienced peace before—(Gamaliel).
  - But now peace has come again!
  - And verse 31 tells us how she handled it.
- My brothers and sisters we need to learn from this example!
  - We live in times of peace...
    - Persecution threatens us,
      - but it is still a time of peace...
        - and we have not handled it well...
    - Our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who are persecuted have done much better.
  - We need to learn from Acts 9:31 how to handle these times.
- So let's get on with it, shall we?
  - Here we are given four things that ought to be happening in times of peace.

### I. First, times of peace ought to be times for edification!

#### A. Edification and peace go together...

1. You can see how they are put together in our text:
  - **Acts 9:31: Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified.**
  - When war ends, you can get on with your building projects.
2. *Edification* has to do with building—
  - an *edifice...a building*.
  - use of the church—
    - speaks of growth in godliness—
3. Times of peace are not to be times of laziness and idleness.
  - They are to be used for edification and for cultivation of fruit.
  - Jesus tells parables and gives many warnings about the danger of prosperity...
    - **Luke 21:34: But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.**
    - **Luke 12:45 "But if that slave says in his heart, My master will be a long time in coming, and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk;**

#### B. What is this godliness that we are to build? What does it look like?

1. Above all: knowing God and Jesus Christ...
  - in Jesus, all fullness of the Godhead...
  - God's glory is revealed most of all in the cross...
  - we are built up as we grasp this.

TRANS> Paul (imitating Jesus) often prays that we would grasp this

- He also prays for another aspect of godliness.

2. He prays that we would understand the will of God and walk in it...
  - for discernment
  - for obedience
  - for faithfulness in your marriage and family and office
  - for diligence in your daily calling...
    - learning to take dominion in the earth (arts, sciences)
    - teaching and educating
    - helping the needy
    - showing hospitality

C. But how do you build yourself up in these things?

1. First, know that it is Christ who promises to build His church...
  - not that it is wrong to speak of building yourself up as Jude does...
  - But you must look to Jesus to build you up...
2. And how do we do it? What does He call us to do?
  - means of grace...
    - hunger like newborn babes for the milk.
  - Times of peace give us so many opportunities!
    - We can easily meet together.
    - We can have bibles, good books, and recorded sermons
    - Make good use of these!
      - If persecution comes, you will be so glad if you have done this.
3. What a blessing times of peace can be for the church when we make the most of these times!
  - What tremendous things we can do!

**II. Times of peace are times for walking in the fear of the Lord.**

A. *Walking in the fear of the Lord* means that we walk as though Christ and His kingdom are the most important thing.

1. We must walk as though:
  - He is Lord!
  - He is sovereign
  - He has all power
  - Our destiny is in His hands
  - He ultimately makes us either happy or miserable
  - As though we must have His mercy or we perish.
2. But in times of peace...
  - It is too easy to start putting other things first...
    - houses and cars and clothes and video games and collections and hobbies and careers and sports and facebook start to become more important!
  - People feel they don't have time for the Lord—
    - this is tragic and evil!

- B. This counsel is very necessary for us in times of peace...
1. This is exactly what Deuteronomy warns about...
    - a. As long as they were in the wilderness, they were conscious of their need for God each day...
      - If He does not provide, they do not eat!
        - In this elementary way, they saw how much they needed Him
      - But after they came into the land, they had houses, and barns...
        - Soon, they suppose they have all this on their own...
        - They suppose that they don't need the Lord.
          - They conclude that they are good people.
            - They can make life good for themselves without God.
            - This is what Deuteronomy warns against!
    - b. And this is what Jesus warns against—all the time!
      - 1) He quotes from Deuteronomy more than any other book.
        - He was very concerned that His church would not seek His kingdom first.
      - 2) He warns about the thorny ground—about forgetting
  2. Prosperity makes us soft.
    - a. That is why the Lord so often sends trials.
      - He would rather send peace, but we have to be chastened.
    - b. This is also why He doesn't send lasting peace until after many generations of godliness...
    - c. The church is often happier in times of persecution...
      - because then we know that we live by what God decrees, not by what we have (bread) alone.
        - Deut 8:3 is often misunderstood:
          - “Man shall not live by bread alone (bread that is there on its own or by our industry)
          - “But by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (His decree that says, “let there be bread on Bill's table today”)
  3. But can we still enjoy the good things of this life and fear God?
    - Yes—all the more so!
      - If we see that they truly do come from God each day...
        - then we are truly thankful!
        - then the abundance draws us near to God—
          - It increases our fear of Him—instead of fear of enemies or weather—
          - We see that God is over the enemies and weather!
            - If they come, He sent them!
              - not weather alone, not enemies alone, but every word...

- But the church does not have a very good track record.
  - Look at us today!
    - We think we got all this on our own!
    - We think we don't need the Lord!
    - We have no fear of God.
    - We do not keep His ways or abstain from evil because we are not walking in the fear of the Lord.
  - When a plane lands—and it is stormy and we are scared...
    - how do we look at it?
      - Is it about the pilot and the random winds?
      - Or do we see God first as the one who sets that plane down according to His will?

TRANS> Times of peace are times for walking in the fear of the Lord.

- for receiving all the abundance with thanksgiving from His hand.

### **III. Times of peace are times for walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit**

A. The word *comfort* (*paraclesis*) corresponds to the name that Jesus gives the Holy Spirit, *the Paraclete*.

1. It is a very comprehensive word.
  - a. A *paraclete* is one who comes to you—beside you—for *paraclesis*—
    - yes to comfort—but much more...
      - to encourage
      - to exhort
      - to strengthen
        - in short, to help
          - to do whatever needs to be done to help!
  - b. So walking in the *paraclesis* of the Holy Spirit is to walk in such a way that you are receiving His help—
    - to comfort, to challenge, to exhort, to correct, to strengthen, to enlighten...
      - It is to live by the grace and power of God which is ministered to us by the Holy Spirit.
      - It is to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you!
2. We don't know enough about this!
  - a. It comes from not walking in the fear of the Lord.
    - If we don't fear God—don't take Him seriously—
      - we don't see much need for the Holy Spirit.
    - We are satisfied with our life the way it is...
      - We are comfortable and have what we want.

- b. It's only when we see the glory of God that we realise how much we need power from above to change us!
  - It is then that the holy God becomes real...
    - Remember what I showed you with Paul's conversion?
      - When he once saw the glory of Christ, his days of supposing himself to be righteous were over!
        - He became desperate for God's forgiveness and help—grace to live!
        - Walking in the Spirit grows out of walking in the fear of the Lord.

B. And what does the Spirit do in particular to help us?

1. I have said, of course, that He strengthens us and comforts us and exhorts us and challenges us and all that...
  - but how does He do this?
    - He does it by His secret working within us!
    - And He does it by showing us Jesus Christ and all that He has done and all that He is to us.
2. In times of peace, we need to rejoice all the more in Jesus and the forgiveness of sin and in the hope of eternal life!
  - We can start to look at the peace we are enjoying in the season of peace and miss the much greater peace we have in Jesus crucified.
    - a. Certainly we ought to rejoice in the season of peace...
      - You ought to see how God graciously gives us seasons of peace...
        - He gives seasons of peace so that...
          - we will not be overwhelmed with sufferings...
          - because He loves us and delights to give us peace...
          - as a foretaste of our ultimate destiny—total peace!
      - b. If you are walking in the Spirit, this rejoicing will not terminate on the present peace...
        - The present season of peace will lead you to rejoice in the peace you have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ!
          - The Spirit always directs us to Jesus!
            - Your name is written in heaven!
            - You are accepted of God!
            - That is way more important than whatever measure of peace we may have at this particular time.
        - c. If you are walking in the Spirit, you will not suppose that those who have everything in this world have everything...
          - You will see that without Christ they have nothing!

- Let the times of peace lead you into a fuller appreciation of Christ and your need of Him...
  - do not let them lead you away from Him.

TRANS> So there you have the third thing that ought to be going on in seasons of peace...

- You ought to be walking in the Holy Spirit—looking to Him to make you holy.
  - So in seasons of peace, such as we have now,
    - there is to be:
      - edification,
      - walking in the fear of the Lord,
      - and walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit...

#### **IV. Fourth, times of peace are times for increase of the church—times for the multiplication of the church.**

- Of course we should always to be labouring to see the church increase
  - whether it be times of peace or times of suffering...
    - We have already seen how the early church was faithful to evangelize everywhere they went—even in times of persecution.
    - And how persecution was itself an opportunity for evangelism... but so are times of peace...
- And we always need to be evangelizing no matter what our situation...
  - People desperately need to be saved...
    - They will remain under God’s curse and go to Hell if they do not come to Jesus!
    - And even more than that—God is worthy to have more worshippers.
      - It brings glory and delight to Him when people are saved.
      - So we should always be working to win others...in times of peace or not...
    - But we have all the more opportunity to do this in times of peace and we ought to make the most of it!
      - There are three ways we have greater opportunity to seek the increase of the church in times of peace...

A. First, we have more opportunity to bring forth children for Jesus Christ!

1. The Bible says that children are blessing from the Lord.
  - But in times of persecution, men are often separated from their wives—sometimes by imprisonment and sometimes by death.
    - Times are desperate and often it is not the time for having children.
    - At least it is greatly hindered.
    - Sometimes it is better to not even marry in such times.

2. But in times of peace—we ought to bring forth lots of children for the Lord.
  - We ought to delight in training them up to be His servants.
    - We can gather with them for family worship.
    - We are so prosperous that we even have the luxury of teaching them at home!
      - It is a tremendous opportunity!
        - The Lord has promised not only to bless us, but to bless us and our children if we keep His covenant...
  - That is...
    - if you do what we have already spoken about...
      - give yourself to edification with the means of grace...
        - If you don't, you can be sure that your children will not know the Lord—not unless God saves them in some other way.
      - And we must walk in the fear of the Lord and in the paracletic of the Holy Spirit.
        - If we make school and hockey and music and ballet to be the most important thing...
          - or movies and cars and careers and houses...
          - We will bring forth children fit for damnation.
  - But my brothers and sisters, God's Spirit and God's grace and God's promise is at work in your home!
    - That means that you can bring forth children for the Lord!
      - And this you ought to do abundantly in times of peace—as the Lord gives you increase.
      - If you are not given this increase, then there are many other ways for you to seek His kingdom—just ask Paul.

B. The second thing we can do to increase the church in times of peace is local evangelism...

1. We can invite people to come to hear the word...
  - a. We can invite people to the special service this coming Lord's Day!
  - b. We can give them Bibles and gospel literature.
  - c. We can direct them to sermons on the web.
  - d. We can share the gospel on the internet.
  - e. We can visit or write letters to them to tell them of our hope.
  - f. We can go out to coffee with them and tell them about Jesus.
  - g. We can talk to them around the lunch table at work.
  - h. You can support local pastors and evangelists...
    - How encouraging it is to see our prison evangelist (Rudy de Vries) at work in the prisons
      - and to have been involved in the planting of the church in Kentville...
      - and now with the church in Kingston.



2. It's a different story when the church has to go into hiding!
    - a. There are tremendous opportunities to witness for Christ in such times...
      - but it is quite different when you have to worship in secret and live in a cave.
      - or when you are shut up in prison.
    - b. God has given us peace and we need to make the most of it to spread His word to the people around us.
      - Do it because you love Jesus!
      - Do it because you love your neighbour.
- C. The third thing we ought to do to increase the church in times of peace is foreign missions.
1. We can give and we can go, if God should call us, and we can pray.
    - a. What opportunities we have today!
      - Travel is easy and relatively unrestricted!
      - We have tremendous facilities to educate missionaries in preparation for the field.
      - We have abundant wealth to give to support missions.
      - We have great abilities to communicate with those across the world.
    - b. The main thing that holds us back is our apathy.
      - We want our toys and our leisure.
      - We'd rather watch a movie than go to a prayer meeting...
      - We are not prepared to sacrifice—to give freely to support this kind of work...
      - And sadly, many missionaries are not committed enough to stay on the field.

TRANS> But the opportunity is there!

2. How thrilling it is to see the gospel go forth...
  - How thrilling to see the work of Cush for Christ in Sudan!
  - How thrilling to see the labours of Jack Whytock in Africa!
  - How thrilling to see the work of Word in Deed as they minister in places of destitution.
  - How thrilling to see the church and school in Suriname that RCM has established through the good hand of the Lord upon them.

TRANS> This is what we ought to be doing in our times of peace and prosperity!

- Our forefathers were very faithful in this work.
  - Much of our prosperity can be credited to their faithfulness.
  - We have a heritage that we did not work for...
    - It is an excellent heritage and we must not squander it!

## **Conclusion**

- O brothers and sisters!
  - How our Lord loves us!
  - He gives us times of peace because He loves us and delights in blessing us.
    - Make the most of these precious times! For Him!
  
- Think about it—what better way to use these days of peace than...
  - for diligence in the means of grace that you might be edified...
  - for walking in the fear of the Lord, remembering that your life is in His hands...
  - for walking in the Holy Spirit, for we need His help to be holy...
  - for labouring for the increase of the church—
    - for children that love Jesus
    - for friends and family that love Jesus
    - and for foreigners who love Jesus.
  
- God has given us these times.
  - We may not have them much longer—
  - Let's use them while we can!
    - We will never regret it if we do.