Main Point: Jesus gives us peace, makes us peaceful, and keeps us at peace because of who He is and what He has done.

At 2:00 a.m. on October 14, 1960, in Ann Arbor, Mich., something remarkable was happening. President John F. Kennedy proposed an idea that would eventually grow into one of the largest aid organizations in the world: the Peace Corps.\(^1\) While Kennedy would not officially establish the Peace Corps until an executive order on March 1, 1961, his comments in the middle of the night in Michigan began a movement that still affects our world today.

The Peace Corps has three goals:\(^2\)

1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

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While offering admirable goals and needed work in our hurting world, the Peace Corps cannot hope to establish lasting world peace. While God asks His people to serve the suffering, we must remember that only Jesus supplies our deepest longings. We need much more than a helping hand to better understand one another. We need to understand our need for Jesus and the peace He provides. Only then can we fully engage in acts of justice and peace in the world for the good of the world.

*Has anyone here ever served in the Peace Corps? What was the experience like?*

*What other organizations do you know of that do this kind of work?*

*What needs do you see in our community today? How might our church work to meet those needs?*
Week 4: The Messiah Who Brings Peace *Isaiah 26*

**Book**

**Main Point:** Jesus gives us peace, makes us peaceful, and keeps us at peace because of who He is and what He has done.

**Text Summary:** Isaiah 26 The sorrow of exile and judgment fades away in the proclamation of peace found in God alone. Jesus offers a complete peace that changes everything in our life. We find peace as we trust in God. We live at peace with others because we trust in God to make things right. Our sovereign God keeps us at peace because His promises never fail.

**Isaiah 26:1–6 [Read]**

**Sub-Point:** Jesus gives us peace as we trust in His grace and mercy.

Jumping ahead in Isaiah from chapter 9 to chapter 26 may seem like a rough transition. Yet, what better way to move from the declarations of the Messiah’s advent (Isaiah 7:10–17; 9:1–7) straight to a declaration of praise, adoration, and exaltation of God’s sovereign faithfulness? This passage represents a particular opportunity for us to hear the jubilant praise and spiritual vitality of those who look to God for all things.

Beginning in verses 1–6, this section of chapter 26 echoes a larger theme in Isaiah emphasizing God as a sovereign who is worthy of trust and love. Isaiah opens this chapter with a call for not simply one small group or one city to declare faith in God alone, but throughout the entire land (v. 1). The responsibility for praising God cannot rest with a select few “super saints” or on the backs of those called to full-time ministry. Rather, all God’s people are beneficiaries of God’s goodness, drawing our hearts to praise the Lord because of His mercy and grace.

Keeping in mind the perpetual unfaithfulness of Judah referenced in the first six chapters of Isaiah and condemned in Isaiah 7–9, the declaration of a sure, strong salvation granted by God to His people comes completely from His grace and mercy (v. 2). Judah had tried to hide in safety behind Jerusalem’s walls but salvation can only come through God! No political alliance, economic system, personal prestige, or physical strength can offer final protection. The walls Isaiah describes are specially designed for the faithful to keep out enemies and ensure safety (v. 2). Peace comes through God alone. All of the military or infrastructural preparations for standing against a human siege are pointless unless God is on your side.

As the “righteous nation” enters the fortified protection of life lived in right relationship with God, the overwhelming peace of God, a “perfect peace” (v. 3), ensues. As referenced throughout the Psalms, perfect peace comes through not simply ritual obedience to God’s law

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but full commitment to living in a way that mirrors God’s character in the world (cf. Psalms 15:1–5; 24:3–10; 118:19–20).\(^4\) The Hebrew word used here in verse 3, *shalom*, represents so much more than simply political or social peace. This concept communicates a wholeness of being, when all that a person is rests in unity with God’s will.\(^5\) *Shalom* encapsulates a deep, lasting harmony with God that pours over into peace with others and even with creation itself.

Peace comes to those whose minds are fully dependent on God alone. When Isaiah references the “mind” in verse 3, he isn’t simply referencing higher brain function. Rather, he is communicating a deep identification of thought, intent, emotion, and action with God. The peace of God is only achieved as everything a person is becomes aligned with all God is. Such alignment is only possible to those who enter into the joys of salvation (v. 1) through the gate opened by God (v. 2) made possible through a righteousness not our own but granted through Jesus Christ (cf. Titus 3:5–7).

The image of the rock in verse 4 communicates the concept of a huge, immovable rock cliff.\(^6\) The people are encouraged to trust not in a temporary or fleeting solution to worry and fear but a permanent, eternal remedy to their needs. God does not offer half-measures but stands as an eternal rock, secure, firm, and trustworthy through every circumstance of life. As we look to God for peace, we receive a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). The final *shalom* offered by Isaiah can only be found in Jesus Christ.

Not only can the people of Judah trust in God because of His eternal faithfulness (v. 4) but because of His sovereign power over all peoples. Whether we like it or not, God disciplines in kindness for the purpose of restoration (Proverbs 3:11). Much as a loving parent disciplines a child, so God works to humble His people to live in obedience and justice (vv. 5–6). Judah had been reckless, arrogant, and abusive. There is grace in God confronting our sin problem. If we are dead in sin and God never opens our eyes to the error of our ways, we will remain on our path of eternal doom. Isaiah reminds Judah, and we are reminded today, that God disciplines with mercy and grace from a heart of love and commitment to giving His children perfect peace.

*If God is worthy of our trust, why is it so difficult to look to Him for “perfect peace?” How can we do better at trusting in Him each day?*

*Where do people go for peace in our day? What does God say about those who look away from Him and to this world for peace?*

*What promises in Scripture bring you peace? Why?*

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Isaiah 26:7-15 [Read]

Sub-Point: Jesus makes us peaceful as we trust in His sovereign plan for justice.

Living in God’s presence and experiencing God’s peace changes the way we live our lives. Isaiah moves from his opening section of praise for the peace found in God to a section outlining the way living out God’s peace affects all of life. To start, Isaiah speaks of the steps and the path of the righteous as “level” (v. 7). The righteous live life as if moving along a reliable, well-worn path. The sense of this description in verse 7 points to a peace not simply in a person’s approach to life (“steps”) but peace in the midst of every season of life.

God does not ask His people to do things that are totally bizarre but offers peace inside and out. In fact, the straight path revealed in verse 7 is further described as a path walked in faithfulness to God’s judgments. God desires His people to live in the ways for which they were created. God made us for His glory and it in the pursuit of His glory that life is most satisfying. Walking in God’s way calms us to wait on Him and live well in this world even as we wait for Him.

The Hebrew word for “wait” in verse 8 indicates an eager anticipation of what God will do. Isaiah is describing a people who are excited to see what’s going to happen in life. The righteous live each day out of deep trust that God has a plan and His plans never fail. The waiting and yearning described by Isaiah in verse 8 draws attention to the power of God’s promises not simply over our thoughts but over our emotions, too. God moves to engage our hearts, bodies, and minds. Greater still, serving God engages every part of our existence, our thoughts, emotions, and actions. Whether we are awake or lying in bed asleep, our soul longs after God (v. 9). As we might describe it, “whatever helps you sleep at night,” Isaiah describes a deep longing for God in the night, the hole in the human experience that only fellowship with God can fill.

Isaiah affirms that mankind’s deepest longings can only be fulfilled in God. When peoples war, fight, and quarrel, it is out of covetous discontentment, a lust for more. As James describes it, mankind fights out of raw desire for power and possession (James 4:1). In direct contrast, God’s people live at peace only when the peace of God lives in His people. Even more, the presence of God’s peace indicates the presence of God’s judgments. Where God’s judgments hold authority, people live at peace because God’s judgments lead to paths of righteousness (v. 9).

In contrast to the righteous living at peace, the wicked live in opposition from God’s ways and reject paths leading to righteousness. As Isaiah points out in verse 10, the wicked reject God’s righteous ways and so miss out on beholding God’s glory and receiving God’s favor. On their own, the wicked assume there are no consequences for their actions (v. 11; cf. Psalm 10:13) because they cannot see God moving. They not only miss the positive peace of God’s loving presence, they miss the warning signs that God will strike them in judgment (v. 11). Tragically,

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Isaiah’s message proclaims that the wicked will see God not as kind Father but as a righteous Judge (v. 11). After all, the wicked do not live life according to God’s way but according to their own way, and God’s coming judgment will consume them.⁹

Yet again Isaiah confirms the peace given to God’s people (v. 12). The faithful remnant in Judah do not experience peace because of acts done in empty service but solely because God has chosen peace for them. God wills peace for His people and has done all that is required to secure their peace (v. 12). Furthermore, Isaiah uses verses 13–15 to contrast the earthly rulers that had failed Judah to the eternal, faithful kingship of the sovereign God. Faithless rulers have stood over Judah, yet they have died and passed on from this present life (v. 13). The wicked rulers who led the people into idolatry, stood in arrogant independence, and sought security in human alliances, have all died to face judgment before God himself.

God’s original warning to the nation in Samuel’s day sees confirmation in Isaiah’s words here (cf. 1 Samuel 8:10–18). Wicked kings had conscripted the nation’s sons to fight their selfish wars (1 Samuel 8:11–12) and the nation’s daughters to work for their own comforts (1 Samuel 8:13). Wicked kings exacted heavy taxes and fees, claiming the best in the land in order to build their own wealth (1 Samuel 8:14–17). And just as God promised in 1 Samuel 8:18, the people cried out for deliverance. Here in Isaiah, the righteous remnant is humbled and now sees God’s eternal kingship as the only source of peace. Living God’s way and in fellowship with God’s people is the only path to an abundant life filled with every good gift (v. 18). Any increase in Judah’s borders came from God alone and any security and peace in our life comes from God alone, too (v. 18).

What does the world see as the path to peace, joy, and happiness? Where do we hear or see these messages?

What does it mean to live life God’s way, walking in God’s path?

How can the Church be better at living peacefully with each other and with our neighbors?

Isaiah 26:16-21 [Read]

Sub-Point: Jesus keeps us at peace as we trust in His promises for this life and the next.

Isaiah concludes this chapter with a development of the future hope for God’s people. Living at peace does not simply change our perspective or practice in this life. Instead, God’s peace encompasses all eternity. Verses 16–17 offer a compelling picture of the kind of dependence practiced by God’s people. Without God, His people are like a woman who has gone through the long travail of carrying a child and laboring for a child only to find that there is no child. What a deep disappointment! A woman works and sacrifices greatly only to find there is

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nothing that comes of all that effort. Isaiah describes the product of all the people’s work as “wind” or a kind of empty vanity.

In many ways, this reflects the human experience lived outside of God’s good grace. Humanity labors long through life’s paths. Yet, there is nothing that satisfies outside of God Himself. We often work very hard, with great sincerity to achieve peace in this life. We look to relationships, material goods, experiences, or countless other idols to give something only God provides: peace. Much like the warning in Ecclesiastes about life’s vanities, Isaiah declares that all life is empty apart from knowing and loving God (Ecclesiastes 12:8–14). Isaiah confirms the vanity of life in the face of the deep peace granted in God.

Even more, Isaiah declares a powerful promise to those who trust in God. Those who put faith in God alone will rise again. Death does not have the last day, God does. The angst and emptiness of verses 17–18 finds its fullest resolution in the Resurrection. While the restoration of national Judah would bring relief to God’s people, the final source of peace is the promise of newness of life to living and dead. Isaiah 25:8 declares that God will swallow death forever and the prophet reiterates God’s authority over life and death itself (v. 19). Isaiah is offering God’s people a present and future hope.

Isaiah concludes this chapter with another reminder of the coming judgment on the wicked. Time and again, Isaiah offers peace and hope to God’s people followed by stern warnings of judgment to the wicked. In verses 20–21, Isaiah warns of coming judgment in language reminiscent of Noah and the Flood (cf. Genesis 7:1, 16). Just as God closed up His people in the ark for protection and preservation, so God calls His people again to prepare for coming wrath. Instead of the ark as a picture of God’s preservation, the people are challenged to take refuge in God their rock and salvation (vv. 1–3). In God, the faithful find refuge even in the middle of terrible circumstances. In God, the faithful receive a sure promise of life everlasting, an offer of peace for this life and the next.

Do people see death as an enemy or a friend? How does the Bible describe death, and how might that inform our perspective on death and dying?

How do people try to find peace when facing death or dire circumstances? How does this influence the choices they make on end-of-life issues?

Why is the Resurrection a source of comfort and how might that change the way we approach life? What difference does the Resurrection make to our life?

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10 Oswalt, Isaiah, 300.
Week 4: The Messiah Who Brings Peace *Isaiah 26*

**Main Point:** Jesus gives us peace, makes us peaceful, and keeps us at peace because of who He is and what He has done.

We all long for peace. The Peace Corps offers a particular path to achieving world peace but there is still something missing: Jesus. Where Jesus lives, there is peace. We should certainly serve our neighbors and the world to alleviate suffering. We should try to be understanding and charitable in our conversations and daily interactions. Yet, let us never forget that our peace cannot be found in the things we do or in the greatness we might achieve. Peace is found in God. Consider these ways to understand, embrace, and live God’s peace today.

**Challenges**

**Look to God for peace.** In our digital age, the world seems so small. We have access to so much information, we couldn’t possibly understand it all. Because we feel as though we know so much and have access to so much information, we may begin to wonder whether there’s something else out there that gives us peace. Sadly, we often look to our jobs, human relationships, unique experiences, or countless other distractions to give us some peace in this life. In America, we already live in such comfort that we become thankless and restless. Find your peace in God. Pray in gratitude for all He has given. Read the Scripture’s promises for protection and joy in Christ. Live in community with the saints in preparation for our eternal fellowship at Christ’s return.

**Work to live at peace.** It’s not easy to live at peace with each other. We all want things out of life and sometimes it’s hard not to fight another person or against our circumstances to get it. Living well in the world takes prayer and practice. Seek to pray each day for Jesus to rule your heart and mind. Pray that God shapes your desires after His kingdom and not your personal preferences. Practice living at peace with your family, friends, and neighbors. The Holy Spirit trains God’s people to live well in the world but we must also develop habits of peace. Seek to guard your tongue when you feel like lashing out at the coworker who is difficult or belligerent. Listen patiently to your teenager or child who seems to just complain all the time. Serve your neighbors through practical acts of service in your neighborhood to show what it means to be ruled by the peace of Christ.

**Witness to others about God’s peace.** God’s people have a wonderful gift to share. God has moved us from the kingdom of darkness and death into the kingdom of light and life. Are you willing to share this good news with others? Do we live differently because we embrace the hope of the Resurrection? Work to include the hope of the Resurrection in your conversations with friends and neighbors. Tell others about the Resurrection by living for things above rather than things below. Tell others about new life in Christ by speaking boldly about the hope in your
heart. There are many who still need to hear the Good News of Jesus. Work to spread the Gospel in your neighborhood, city, and around the world.