

**THE BIG IDEA: God's peace often blows man's peace to pieces.**

The Take-Off

Can I start this morning by showing you a picture of what we DON'T want to have happen to you over the next few weeks? (Like I'm not going to if you said no!)

In 1992 at Barcelona, Gail Devers was attempting to be the first woman to ever win gold in the 100m and 100m hurdles.

After winning gold in the 100m race, she led the entire 100m hurdle race until she clipped the last hurdle and stumbled across the finish line in 5th place.

We don't want you to stumble. We want you to finish strong, not just this study in Acts, but also the race of faith that you're running as a follower of Jesus.

Paul - the man whose life we're studying right now in Acts - wrote these words towards the end of his life: "I have finished the race."

I believe that what we'll learn from Acts this morning can be the fuel you and I need to not only make it to the finish, but out-sprint others to the tape.

Let me give you the Big Idea, and then let's try to walk through a pretty hefty chunk of Acts and see how it plays out.

First, the Big Idea: **God's peace blows man's peace to pieces.**

Now, right away you can see that we've got some terms to define, because there's no way that statement is going to make any of us jump up and down for joy about following Jesus, so let's try to make sure we're on the same page before we turn to Acts 24-26.

**1. The truth about peace**

- a. We turn on the news and hear about peace treaties, all of us want peace of mind and every beauty pageant contestant has to want world peace, right?
- b. Parents of young children would be happy with some peace and quiet, too.
- c. We use the term peace a lot and it sounds so good, and because of how we've been conditioned to understand what peace is, when I say that God's peace can blow our peace to pieces, each of us is going to kind of pushback on that a bit.
- d. Man's idea of peace is basically an agreement for how we'll behave for a set amount of time, right?
- e. Peace treaty means 2 countries won't fight for "x" number of years. Parents on a long road trip with small children will play the quiet game for 5 minutes just to have some peace. Neighbors that can't get along will build a fence so they can have peace.
- f. But if you think about it, none of that is really peace. All of that is just a pause from the chaos.
- g. In order for us to have true peace, we have to have true rest. That's the problem with man's peace, right? We know deep down that it might not last, and knowing that makes us uneasy and thus we can't relax.
- h. Man's peace is a lot like a parent of a newborn trying to relax in the bed after finally getting the baby in the crib. There's always an underlying uneasiness.
- i. But God's peace is a lasting peace, and it lasts in every situation whether good or bad.
- j. It allowed Jesus to sleep in a boat when fishermen were freaking out during a squall (Mark 4:38)
- k. It allows followers of Jesus to experience rest even when it seems that they shouldn't (Philippians 4:7)
- l. Man's peace is based on external circumstances; God's peace is based on internal relationships.
- m. True peace comes from a right relationship with God through what Jesus did on the cross.
  - We were God's enemies (Romans 5:10)
  - Jesus died for us (Romans 5:8)
  - When we trust Jesus' work on the cross, we have peace (Romans 5:1)
- n. Hopefully, some of this is helping you to understand today's Big Idea. The only way for us to experience real peace with God is for God to blow our lame attempts at peace to smithereens.
- o. It isn't because he's a jerk. It's because he is always trying to show us that his peace in Jesus is far more lasting than man's peace with Jesus.
- p. Let's summarize it this way. Man builds walls in order to live in peace from each other. Jesus destroys walls so we can live in peace with each other.

## 2. How God blows our peace to pieces

- a. Remember, our common idea of peace is that it's feeling based, and so anytime something doesn't feel good, we think of it as bad.
- b. Quick example: A married couple arguing constantly. Their first thought is divorce because they just want peace. But God's peace would be achieved when they do the internal, soul work in order to be able to live together with respect and communication skills that honor one another.
- c. Sometimes the disturbance in the peace isn't Satan or your circumstances. Sometimes it's the convicting power of the truth of God.
- d. In Acts 24-26, we'll see this played out in the lives of 3 different men in authority over Paul, and that should help us kind of flesh out this concept.
- e. First time: Felix
  - Paul shares his defense against false charges
  - Felix is curious about Paul and "the Way" and asked to hear some more (24:24)
  - He and his wife listened TO A POINT and then said "no more" (24:25)
  - That point was Paul speaking about righteousness, self-control and judgement
  - He knew the story of Drusilla leaving her first husband to marry Felix
  - God's peace (being right with God) would have to blow their peace to pieces
  - "I'll send for you when it's convenient" (Acts 24:25)
- f. Second time: Festus
  - Paul shares his defense against false charges (again - new trial)
  - Eventually Paul appeals to Caesar (basically the Roman trump card - it ensured he would go to Rome and not back to Jerusalem where there was a plot to kill him)
  - Festus brings the King in to also hear Paul's defense - basically so he can figure out what to charge him with
  - At this point, Paul is something of a mystery to these men
  - Acts 26:24 - after Paul mentioned the resurrection, Festus tapped out, saying Paul was mad
  - The reality of a risen Jesus would have blown Festus' peace to pieces
- g. Third time: King Agrippa
  - After Festus has had enough, Paul turns the attention to the King
  - Paul shines the light directly on Agrippa in Acts 26:26-27
  - "You are familiar with these things" and "none has escaped your notice" and "I know you believe the prophets" all turned the heat up a little on the King
  - Notice the conviction that Agrippa was feeling in verse 28!
  - But ultimately, he rose and left Paul there and made no decision about The Risen King

## 3. Putting the pieces together

- a. To really tie these three trials back to the Big Idea, I need you to remember that Paul has been in chains the whole time.
- b. Living in God's peace isn't the same as living an easy life, and for many of us, that statement is enough to shatter our idea of peace to pieces
- c. The goal of Christianity isn't anointed bubblegum and butterflies, it's peace with God and a relentless pursuit of bringing that same peace to others who need it
- d. These 3 leaders rejected it - at least as far as we know - and left Paul in chains
- e. But Paul had peace because he knew - and later would write in Romans 8:39 - that NOTHING could separate him from the God who gave him that peace
- f. Jesus is the Prince of Peace but he's not a King of Convenience, and Paul knew that
- g. Paul was inconvenienced all the time as a result of having peace with God
- h. I was sent a transcript of an interview this week that someone did with Francis Chan and I want to read part of it to you just to help us nail this idea down about God's peace and our attempts at peace
- i. Chan started a church in CA that grew to 5,000 people before he left it, mostly because he got tired of telling Christians over and over again what they already knew but weren't living
- j. Today, he is a part of a downtown church in San Francisco, and he sees on a much larger scale much of what we see being in the downtown location here in Albemarle
- k. In response to the first question, "What's new about your ministry focus these days?" Chan said this:

*I'm excited again. When I was in high school, I used to cry for my friends when I would think about spending eternity apart from them. When I was working in the restaurant, I used to cry over the other waiters and waitresses and pray, "God, you've got to save these people."*

*Working in the church, I didn't weep a whole lot for the lost. It was just kind of sporadic here and there.*

*Now that I'm spending so much more time building relationships with unbelievers and loving on them, there are a lot more tears, a lot more sadness, a lot more urgency. It is painful and can get depressing, and yet **there's this peace** about finally going out and fishing for men.*

*At the same time, even though I'm crying, it's a good sadness. I think it's what Paul felt in Romans 9, of that unceasing anguish, the great sorrow and unceasing anguish. While it hurts, **there's also this peace** that this is what I'm supposed to be doing. It's great that I hurt for people again.*

*It's great that I actually weep for the lost. I'm not just this zombie, going about doing a job. It feels good to care so much and even hurt so much at times. So I would just really encourage people to not get too caught up in methodology or whatever else because once your heart breaks enough for people, you'll find a way to get the message to them.*

### The Landing

**God's peace often blows man's peace to pieces.**

And let me say this one more time, Jesus is the Prince of Peace, not a King of Convenience.

If you're here this morning and you've never made the decision to follow Jesus, then your attempts at peace may work for a while, but at some point - just like an infant in the crib - it will come to an end

If you're here and you've been doing the church thing, then the idea of really allowing God to give you his peace by blowing your peace to pieces isn't going to sound very convenient

I can only speak for myself, but I'm convicted by the passion that I see in Paul - the same passion for souls that were echoed in these words from Francis Chan - and for me, the response has to be repentance and recommitting myself to follow God's peace even when it may seem inconvenient to do so

We're going to sing a bit, and I invite you to use that time to respond however you need to