

## Peace in Christ.– Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2015

***“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33***

Beloved in The Lord,

We would be hard pressed to find someone in the world who wouldn't agree with Jesus statement “*in the world you have tribulation.*” Sooner or later we all experience trouble of one sort or another, sooner or later we experience grief and sorrow because they are very much a part of life.

Jesus tells it like it is. He doesn't try to portray life through rose tinted glasses. Jesus never beats around the bush, but He tells it like it is. “*In the world you have tribulation!*” This is the case, because our original parents – Adam and Eve sinned and plunged the world and mankind into trouble. Their rebellion is the source of all our problems. Before they fell, there was no sorrow or pain or tribulations. They lived in Eden, in paradise. But their disobedience, their rebellion, plunged this world into sin.

Falling into sin, they failed to fulfill their God given duties, and they opened the door for Satan to come in and operate. He is pure evil and only does evil. Jesus described him by saying: “***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly***” (John 10:10).

The devil steals, kills and destroys. That is what he does, and he does it because he is God's enemy.

Today in this service we commemorate a time of great tribulation and sorrow for our nation Latvia, and indeed all the Baltic States. 74 years ago the mass deportations began and many thousands of innocent people were brutally removed from their homes in the middle of the night, rounded up into cattle carts and sent off to Siberia. Many perished, many never returned to their homeland.

Sadly these types of atrocities have occurred and continue to occur over and over again throughout regions of the World. There are many places today where horrible things are being done to human beings by other human beings.

Where Godlessness prevails, where God is denied and His Word is ignored there atrocities follow. Where God is removed, there Satan has a free run to steal, kill and destroy.

We are living in dark and dangerous times. It seems that the world is getting ever darker day by day. How are we to live? How are we to react?

Jesus tells us in very plain and simple language: “***Take courage, for I have overcome the world.***” Jesus is telling us to be courageous; to fix our hope and trust on Him. If and when we do He fills our hearts with peace. This peace is different to anything the world has to

offer. Jesus said: ***“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” (Jn.14:27)***

Jesus offers His peace to us. His peace far surpasses anything that we find here. Paul wrote: ***“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil.4:6-7)***

God’s peace far surpasses our comprehension, and we can only receive it from Christ Jesus the Lord. We can only have true peace in Christ. It is ours for the asking if we come to Him in faith.

There are two possible ways, or two different attitudes we can have as we commemorate the 14<sup>th</sup> of June. We can be like the vast majority of people who have a deep hatred for the perpetrators, who basically hate Russians. They live with bitterness in their heart. We can harbour bad thoughts, harden our hearts and be unforgiving. If we choose this attitude (and it is a choice) then we must be aware of the consequences. Harboursing unforgiveness has a dire effect on us. Evil thoughts, thoughts of revenge and unforgiveness are poisonous. Hatred breeds more hatred and by being in an attitude of unforgiveness, we jeopardize our own forgiveness. Jesus taught:

***“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” (Mt.6:14-15)***

These are extremely important words.

The other attitude that we can have is to have a Christ-like attitude. When Jesus was crucified, He looked down from the cross and He prayed that the Father would forgive those who had sought His death, because they didn’t know what they were doing.

We are to forgive, as Jesus forgave, because when we forgive, then we are reflecting Jesus heart. When we forgive, we are also releasing ourselves from bondage. Forgiveness doesn’t mean forgetting what happened, or pretending it never happened. No, forgiveness is dealing with it. We have not forgotten those who suffered and died. We remember them today. By forgiving, we open our heart to receive the peace that Jesus spoke about. In forgiving we strengthen our faith and we draw near to the heart of God. Forgiveness has tremendous power, as indeed does unforgiveness. Forgiveness releases blessing, unforgiveness a curse.

In order to receive and maintain the peace that Jesus talks about we need to set our minds correctly. Paul continues in the passage from Philippians:

***“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” (Phil. 4:8)***

You see, Paul is telling us to fix our thoughts on good things. If we continually mull over the past and keep remembering all the atrocities, and what we have lost, what has been done

to us, then we will drag ourselves very very low and the consequences are our thoughts, words and deeds will not be honouring to God.

On the other hand, if we fill our minds with things that are good, with thoughts of God and His precious Word, then our thoughts, words and deeds will honour Him, and our life will be pleasant.

We find this truth reiterated throughout the Bible., Paul writes:

***“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” (Col.3:1-2)***

Set your mind on the things above. Concentrate your thoughts upon Jesus and His Word. Fill your mind with Him, fill your mind with Scripture.

Paul writes in this same letter: ***“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup> Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. <sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” (Col.3:12-17)***

We are given two very clear directives: Be thankful to God for all things and make sure that the Word of God dwells amongst us richly. If we heed these two very clear directives, then we will experience the peace of Christ no matter what is going on. This peace will continually grow and we will live life as God intended.

Paul uses the word richly in describing how God’s Word should be dwelling in us. Herein is the key to peace in Christ. Be rich in God’s Word. Read it daily and read it a lot. Receive it into your heart and meditate upon it day and night. The more you do, the greater the peace, and the more courageous you will be.

A good prayer to pray regularly is the great prayer of St. Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life. Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.