

Blessings for Believers

Matthew 5:6-9

(The following text is taken from a sermon preached by Gil Rugh in 1983)

1. Those Who Hunger and Thirst For Righteousness
2. Those Who Hunger and Thirst For Righteousness Desire God's Character
3. The Merciful
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6. Proclaim Genuine Peace
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After recording the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus Christ, Matthew begins in chapter 5 to unfold Christ's teaching regarding the coming kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount is a description of the character and conduct of those who will be part of that kingdom as described in the last study. The Sermon is addressed to Jews anticipating the kingdom and describes the character and conduct expected of one who will be part of that kingdom.

The Beatitudes is the familiar name of the opening section of the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes describe the character of the child of God who has believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Such a person is blessed and has spiritual prosperity. He has true inner happiness provided by God.

As explained in the last study, even though the Sermon is directed toward Jews who were expecting the coming kingdom, it has direct application today because God's expectation of the character of His children is unchanging. Since the character of God is unchanging, the character of His children should remain the same from one generation to another. Therefore, the character of one anticipating the coming kingdom two thousand years ago should be the same as the character of a believer in Jesus Christ today. Some elements in the Sermon are directed toward the coming earthly kingdom and so those elements are not directly applicable today. However, the basic emphases of the Sermon apply today very directly.

In the study of the first five verses of this chapter, three of the Beatitudes Jesus delivered in the Sermon on the Mount were considered. In the succeeding verses Jesus continues on the same theme with a similar simplicity and abruptness which characterizes all of the Beatitudes. It is interesting to note that each of these Beatitudes is a statement of fact, not a promise of happiness. This happiness is given as a description of certain individuals with a promise attached to each description.

1. Those Who Hunger and Thirst For Righteousness

The fourth Beatitude continues in Matthew 5:6: **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst**

for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." The emphasis of this statement is that those who are blessed have an insatiable appetite for God's righteousness. Today's society is not really familiar with hunger and thirst. However, in biblical times in the Middle East, dying of thirst would be a very real danger in those dry, arid regions. Jesus is saying that just as the body craves and desires food and water, so the believer is one who craves and desires righteousness. That desire is a driving motivation for the believer. Jesus' statement in this verse is similar to another statement made later in the sermon: **"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you"** (Matt. 6:33).

Hungering and thirsting after righteousness is descriptive of a believer who has *already* experienced the righteousness of Christ by faith. A believer receives that righteousness the moment he believes in Jesus Christ as his Savior, through the righteous declaration of a holy God who cleanses and forgives on the basis of the finished work of Christ. **"But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness"** (Romans 4:5). That righteousness is received by faith, not by any kind of work. It is crucial to understand that a person has righteousness before God by believing, not by doing something. That is quite different from the emphasis other religions of the world give today; they stress that you can be righteous if you *do* what God wants. The Bible says you will be righteous if you *believe* in what Jesus Christ has done. He has died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and has been raised from the dead.

Later in the same chapter, Paul speaks of how this righteousness is applied to the life of the believer. **"... He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification"** (Romans 4:25). To justify means to declare righteous. Jesus has secured righteousness for us. In the next verse Paul says, **"Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Romans 5:1). This tells us that we experience God's righteousness through faith.

Paul addresses the same subject in 1 Corinthians 1:30: **"But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."** Jesus Christ is to us righteousness because by believing in Him we become righteous before God as the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. When Jesus says in Matthew 5:6, **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied,"** He is referring to those who have already entered into that personal relationship with Him through faith and have experienced His righteousness. Those individuals have an increasing appetite in their pursuit of that righteousness. Their lives then focus on Christ because *He* is righteousness. As believers, we desire His character and His righteousness, not our own!

2. Those Who Hunger and Thirst For Righteousness Desire God's Character

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are those who have an intense appetite for more of God's character in their lives. Unbelievers do not have such a hunger and thirst for righteousness. The Book of Romans indicates just the opposite for unbelievers in the opening chapters, particularly in chapter 3. But the believer should have a greater appetite for more of

God's character.

The believer in Jesus Christ will have a desire for more maturity, wishing to be conformed more and more to the character of Christ. Paul wrote in Romans 6:12, 13: **"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."** The pursuit and practice of righteousness and development of the character of God is to be the goal of the believer in every area of life and in every activity. Paul continues in verse 16, **"Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?"**

Paul goes on in the same chapter to make it very clear that we are to give our bodies over in every area to righteousness, **"and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification"** (vs. 18,19). We are to have an intense appetite for more of God's character to be seen in every area of our lives. Such a display of God's righteousness is to be the characteristic of one who has an appetite for the character of God.

As Paul addressed the Philippian believers he spoke with the same concern: **"But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law [things I would do], but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith"** (Phil. 3:7-9). This refers to the initial transforming righteousness that the believer receives the moment he believes in Jesus Christ as his Savior.

Then Paul continues in verses 10 through 14, **"that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."**

Paul is saying that he has not yet arrived at absolute perfection. He has the righteousness of Christ, but now he wants to be more like Him, conformed to Him in His resurrection -- in His perfection. Paul is saying that he has a hunger and thirst for righteousness -- a driving desire to be like Jesus Christ. Paul's great desire was **"that I may know Him, and the power of His**

resurrection" (v.10).

David spoke about the same thing in Psalm 42:1,2: **"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."** You can surely see the similarity between what David says in these verses and what Christ said in Matthew 5:6. David says that just as the deer pants after the water brooks, he has that same longing and intense thirst for righteousness.

There is something else that should be noted about this Beatitude. There are many today who hunger and thirst for a greater experience, but this blessedness is pronounced upon those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. The statement is basic, and yet so simple. Some Christians are pursuing experiences here, there and everywhere, yet God pronounced blessing upon those who have that intense desire for His righteous character. We need to be sure that we are motivated by what God says will bring spiritual prosperity and happiness into our lives. This righteousness is revealed in the Word of God, and it is the revelation of the character of God Himself. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul says that as we behold the glorious character of Jesus Christ in the mirror of the Word, the Spirit of God transforms us into conformity with the image of His glory: **"But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."** That is God's strategy for producing righteousness in all of our being. Therefore, we ought to be hungering and thirsting for the Word, **"like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you might grow in respect to salvation"** (1 Peter 2:2).

As we think about growing in righteousness, we are really considering how to become more like Jesus Christ. We should be hungering and thirsting for the Word and the character of God. What a tragedy to see Christians chasing around after experiences when the Word of God says that we are to have an insatiable appetite for His character and righteousness which is produced as we absorb the Word of God under the ministry of the Spirit who transforms us in every area of our lives.

3. The Merciful

In the next Beatitude, Jesus says in Matthew 5:7, **"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."** Each Beatitude must be interpreted in the context of the others. This Beatitude, just as those preceding it, is descriptive of the believer. Blessing is pronounced upon the merciful because the Scripture assumes as reality that those who have experienced the mercy of God will manifest the character of God and will, thus, manifest His mercy.

Could Jesus be saying that if you show mercy, you will be saved and will receive mercy? Can He be describing a way to receive salvation? Impossible! This verse is not giving a new way to be saved. It is not saying that if you do some act of kindness to someone, God will forgive you and give you salvation. Such an approach would be contrary to the whole teaching of Scripture. It is even contrary to the tenor of the Beatitudes. The statement is a description of believers.

Believers have been the recipients of God's great mercy. This mercy which we have received individually and personally is so overwhelmingly vast that everything else pales into insignificance. So it is expected that those who have been the beneficiaries of such overwhelming mercy will naturally be characterized by being merciful and will manifest God's character in this way.

In Ephesians Paul exhorts believers to manifest this character. **"And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you"** (Eph. 4:32). Those who have experienced forgiveness are expected to demonstrate this forgiveness in their dealings with others. What a contradiction that those who have been forgiven so much should be unwilling to forgive someone else.

Those who have received so much mercy should be showing mercy to others. Jesus gave an extended account of a situation in Matthew 18 to demonstrate this: **"Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven'"** (vs. 21,22). That is 490 times. The point is that you should not be keeping count of offenses.

Jesus continues the account in verses 23 through 27. **"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt."**

The king had mercy on the slave. Grace and mercy are similar, but there is a distinction. Grace is undeserved love to men in their sins; mercy is undeserved love to men in their misery. Mercy is connected with misery and suffering. This man, in his misery, is about to lose everything, but he is shown mercy and is forgiven.

Jesus continues with a contrast in verse 28: **"But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii."** This is a totally insignificant amount in comparison to the ten thousand talents the slave had owed to the king. In fact, the one hundred denarii wouldn't even pay the interest on ten thousand talents. **"And he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?'"** (vs.28-33).

The point of the illustration is that we who have been forgiven so much and who have received so much mercy ought to be people of mercy and forgiveness. When Jesus said, "**Blessed are the merciful**" (Matt 5:7), He was saying that mercy should be a characteristic of believers because we have received so much mercy.

Several passages in the Bible emphasize our responsibility to show mercy. Ephesians 2:4 speaks of "**God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.**" Even when we were sinners we experienced redemption by God. It is easy for us as Christians to forget and fail to show mercy. If we face a situation where someone offends us or does something grievous against us, we sometimes end up saying, "I can't forgive him." We forget that the offense against us is nothing in comparison to the mercy we have received from God. How out of character that we should be unforgiving and unmerciful! We need to realize that no matter what kind of situation we are in, we will never be expected to give as much mercy to others as we have received from God.

Believers are expected to be merciful. As the objects of God's mercy, we should be willing to give mercy. In such an analogy, we see forgiveness and mercy forming a circle. Showing mercy does not save us, but when we have been forgiven through the mercy of God, we will show mercy. One who is unmerciful is revealing a character that is not like God, indicative of the fact that he is not one of the blessed, not one of those who is forgiven by God's mercy. The challenge for believers is to be more consistent in the manifestation of God's glorious character in every area. It is when the pressure is on that we have the greatest opportunity to reveal the mercy as found in God's character.

4. The Pure in Heart

Jesus continues with the next Beatitude in Matthew 5:8: "**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**" Blessing is pronounced upon those who are pure in heart. The heart is a reference to the inner person, what you are at the center of your being. It can include your emotions and your mind. Jeremiah said, "**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked**" (Jer. 17:9, KJV). This reference is to the total depravity of the person. Jesus spoke of evil in the heart in Matthew 12:34: "**You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.**" Jesus says we cannot speak what is good because we speak out of our hearts, and the heart is depraved and desperately wicked. Therefore, how could good things come out of a depraved heart? "Good" in this context refers to recognizing and knowing God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and the truth concerning Him.

Jesus explains to Peter in Matthew 15 that it is not external things that defile, but defilement comes from the inside. "**But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man**" (vs.18-20). It is not external, physical acts that defile, but defilement comes from the heart. Millions of people go to churches and go through all sorts of rituals and formalities thinking they will be clean when they come out.

Some think that if they get baptized, they will be cleansed from their sins as though some physical, external act could cleanse the inner person. The problem is that defilement is in the wicked heart, and it is purity in heart that God demands. The challenge is to have the wicked, vile, depraved heart cleansed and purified.

The Word says that **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Romans 3:23) and **"there is none righteous, not even one"** (v.10). The Bible also says, **"Blessed are the pure in heart"** (Matt. 5:8). This ought to drive home the point that only God can cleanse our hearts. No matter what I may do, I cannot reach down to the inside of my very being and change my heart. Only God can do that.

Peter's statement in 1 Peter 1:22, **"Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls . . ."** refers to how that purification was experienced in verse 23, **"through the living and abiding word of God."** Purification of heart comes as a result of hearing the gospel that Christ died to pay the penalty for sin. When you obey by believing in Him, your soul is purified. Isn't that amazingly simple? It puts a stop to every other action designed to secure salvation.

You do not have to do anything else. If you want a pure heart, recognize that you are a sinner and that Jesus Christ, God's Son, died to pay the penalty for your sins and was raised from the dead as proof that the penalty had been paid. Place your faith in Him, and in that instant of time God cleanses and purifies your heart. Thus you become acceptable before Him. Then when you are changed in the very center of your being, your conduct, attitudes and actions begin to experience a transformation. You will then begin to live a pure life. But you are not pure in heart because you live a pure life. You may try hard, do the best you can and avoid certain activities. That is all fine, but it does not make you pure in heart. You must be cleansed within to have a pure heart. Then your actions can be brought into conformity with the Word. David understood that as he prayed in Psalms 51:10, **"Create in me a clean heart, O God."**

Where else could we go for cleansing on the inside? There is something exciting about a relationship with God. It brings cleansing and purification within. When I trust Christ as my Savior, my very being as a person is transformed.

5. The Peacemakers

Jesus said, **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"** (Matt. 5:9). How many times has this verse been used by people in the peace movement who are talking about putting an end to war? There seems to be no end to the ranting and raving of ignorant, unlearned people who wrest the Scriptures from their context and twist and distort them to prove something. Such individuals pull a verse out of Scripture, **"Blessed are the peacemakers,"** and proclaim that we are to be part of the peace movement. That verse has nothing to do with the peace movement! To use the Scriptures in such a way is a travesty.

This statement about peacemakers comes within the context of the children of God. Society desires peace. When some people read this verse, they immediately want to apply it to an absence of war. But that is not the emphasis of this verse. The point is more significant and

more basic than that. The individuals He is speaking about are those who have experienced God's peace in their lives.

Paul wrote in Romans 5:1, **"Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."** Those who have experienced God's peace through His Son are the ones who have God's happiness and joy. They are the ones involved in bringing this peace to others. Surely Jesus was not referring to peacemakers in the Roman empire, the mighty military power of His day. He is pronouncing blessing upon *His* people who have experienced *His* peace and are now bringing that peace to others. They have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation. Jesus is not addressing the issue of peace with superficiality. He is dealing with the issue of true, basic peace.

Remember that Isaiah said there is no peace for the wicked. Therefore, it is absolutely futile for a so-called Christian to be involved in trying to bring peace among those who cannot have peace. God says there will be no peace for the wicked. Those who are trying to promote some kind of superficial, external, phony peace pull verses out of Scripture and apply them improperly to support their position.

True peace comes through the blood of the cross. "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col.1:19,20). Paul continues in verse 22, **"yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach."** Peacemakers are those who are proclaiming peace through the cross of Christ.

The context of peace has to be **"the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord"** (Heb.13:20). God's peace is in the context of the finished work of Jesus Christ. If you want to be a peacemaker, you must promote, preach and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. James 4 says that wars and quarrels come from within our own lustful members. If you bring about the transformation of the heart, you will bring peace. Without transforming the heart, you have nothing related to peace.

It is foolish and ridiculous to try to conform the wicked to another mold. Jesus is not pronouncing blessing on those who are attempting such futile endeavors. He is pronouncing blessing on those who are bringing God's peace. Those are the true peacemakers.

6. Proclaim Genuine Peace

Paul gives instructions in Ephesians 6:14,15: **"Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace."** As believers we are to be involved in carrying the gospel of peace. It is a message concerning Christ that brings peace to those who believe. Thus we are the peacemakers.

The one who trusts Christ as his Savior faces a new life and new responsibilities. Paul said, **"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"** (2 Cor. 5:17,18). Christ has made us peacemakers and has given us the responsibility to carry this message of reconciliation to others.

The peacemakers are those who have been reconciled by God and are now given the ministry of reconciliation. Speaking of this reconciliation, Paul continues, **"namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (vs. 19-21). We have been made the peacemakers because we have experienced God's peace. We have been given a ministry of reconciliation to bring men and women into a right relationship with God.

A peacemaker is one who proclaims the truth of the finished work of Jesus Christ. To distort that into something else is a corruption of the Word of God and is unacceptable. In fact, it makes the ministry of Christ contrary to what it really is.

The Devil has no end of plans to get us off the track and on to things that *seem* to be good. Because of a lack of understanding of what the Scripture is really saying, some Christians get caught up in other issues. It is a serious matter to misuse and mishandle the Scriptures. These comments will probably bring me some fan mail from those who will say, "My, you were very unkind." That amazes me. If a medical doctor does not practice as he should, he is called a quack. But if a preacher garbles, twists, and misuses the Scriptures, we are supposed to let it go. "Yes, but he is sincere," someone rationalizes. Yes, and he is sincerely wrong. We have too many sincere people who have been misinformed running around quoting Bible verses they do not understand. It is a serious matter; this is the Word of God.

7. Peace Brings Conflict

If the peace Christ is talking about in the Beatitudes is simply peace and harmony among human beings on earth, there are some real problems with the rest of Scripture. One such problem is in Matthew 10, a passage you do not hear those in the peace movement using very much: **"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me"** (vs.34-37). Christ came to bring a sword and conflict, yet some people run around saying that as Christians we ought to be doing away with all of that.

Christians ought to be carrying the message that changes the heart and brings peace. That will

result in transformed conduct. If everyone in the world were a believer submissive to the Spirit of God, there would be no conflict. There will be no wars in the Millennium when Jesus Christ rules in righteousness. But to take those who are depraved and desperately wicked of heart and tell them that we are going to do away with war is to be so naive of the Scriptures that it raises questions as to whether you really understand the Scriptures at all. We have been given a message of reconciliation and life. What a message! So Christ says, **"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword"** (v.34). But He promises blessing to the peacemakers.

Christ does bring peace -- peace of heart -- but it often brings conflict. That should tell us something about the peace we are commanded to bring to people.

This is not a peace at any cost. We are talking about the proclamation of the truth that brings peace and that will often bring great conflict. It will divide family and friends. But we must proclaim the message of peace and reconciliation to Christ no matter what kind of strife, controversy or conflict that the message of peace stirs up. After all, Jesus says He came to bring a sword.

But note the contrast in the next chapter. **"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls"** (Matt. 11:27-29). What an amazing contrast! In one chapter Jesus says that He did not come to bring peace but a sword; in the next chapter He is promising rest for the souls of those who come to Him.

8. The Only True Peace

Am I pro-war? No. Am I glad we have conflicts? NO! But in light of the Word of God, I realize that sinful and depraved men go to war because of the lusts of their flesh and the depravity of their hearts. The only peace that can be brought is the peace that God brings to the heart as a result of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As believers we ought to take this Beatitude very seriously. Are you a peacemaker? How many people heard from you this week about the gospel which brings peace? A special blessing is pronounced upon those who bring this peace. We have experienced reconciliation with God and His peace. Now God expects us to be sharing that message with others. He demands that we represent Him and proclaim the reconciliation which is available through Him to the world. What an honor that we who have experienced this peace are privileged to share it with others.

Do you fit the description of the Beatitudes? Are you really a child of God? God is concerned with your inner heart. He is not concerned with whether you come to church, whether you are on the board, teach Sunday school or have been baptized. He is concerned with whether you have ever come into a right relationship with Him. Have you ever understood that you are a

sinner for whom Christ died? Have you believed that He died to pay the penalty for your sins?
To understand and believe that is to experience His peace.