

**Theme:** Set apart for heaven

The hymn, "It Is Well" begins, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say, 'It is well with my soul.' " How? How can it be well with a person's soul when tornadoes destroy their house or while tears stream down their cheeks during a funeral? Where does the otherworldly ability to take heart and be at peace come from? Not this world, but the Son of God, Jesus, who came into it from heaven. Jesus is peace. Jesus gives us peace, no strings attached, no backsies. His peace is how we're able to be who he's made us to be, people headed for heaven who live like it in a messed up world that tries to rob us of the peace Jesus gives.

More than anything, Jesus wants us to remain in him and the peace of knowing we're saved. So in the upper room as he looked forward to his death and resurrection, he has the objects of his saving work in his mind and on his heart: you are me! Jesus pours out his heart to his Father in prayer letting his divine inner monologue be fully availed to his disciples revealing a deep love and the most profound desire to keep the people he loves so dearly safe and bound for eternal life in the heaven he's leaving to prepare for them. "*Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.*" **(John 17:11b)** Think about that! Jesus asked the Father to protect you and keep you saved by the power of God's almighty name with the added result that we are one, united by faith in the one Lord Jesus just like he and the Father are one. Jesus wants unity among us so we constantly look for what breaks it and constantly strive to remove it through the non-stop process of forgiving and repenting to one another then moving forward in grace.

The hope of life in Jesus, the knowledge that Jesus died once to save us, unites us and is our collective peace is where our ability to watch out for and protect each other comes from knowing the Father neither slumbers nor sleeps to always protects us and keep us safe. That's what Jesus wants, all God's people together, safe and sound. Found. Jesus doesn't want a single one to be lost or destroyed and he doesn't lose any. Judas he does call the one doomed to destruction so Scripture would be fulfilled. Jesus said these things so that we'd know they are even before his suffering and return to the Father so our joy in him would be complete.

To prepare us for the time after his ascension before his return, Jesus prayed, *“I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.”* **(John 17:14)** Because Jesus tells us so, we shouldn’t be shocked when this invariably happens, doesn’t mean it’s easy to deal with, but Jesus tells us up front so we can expect it. People hated Jesus because he told truth many didn’t want to hear. John 1 explains that people hate the light because their deeds are dark, evil, and light exposes them. If the Light of life, Jesus, is hated, the children of light, Jesus’ followers, will be also. To believe the gospel is also to reject worldly thinking and ways of being and, to a degree, the world at large because Jesus’ people long for a better one.

Earlier on in the upper room, Jesus said, *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup> If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”* **(John 15:18-19)** If you’re hated because of belief in the Word, it means you’re a person of heaven operating as such by being like the Lord of Heaven, Jesus, in whose image you are made new. Jesus didn’t operate according to the expectations of a broken world. He was heavenly. He met hate with love, violence with kindness, mockery with forgiveness; he showed mercy. Let it be for these reasons Jesus’ followers are hated. If people hate Christians, let it be because we were acting as children of heaven by shining out the saving light and love of Jesus. And then rejoice because, *“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup> If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”* **(I Peter 4:14-16.)** You can’t suffer for being a Christian if you’re not a Christian. Be like Stephen who trusted he was saved, knew he was a person set apart for heaven and acted like it by praying that God wouldn’t hold his murders’ sin against them. Have this mentality and take heart in Jesus who overcame the world and is our peace. Peace kicks out a fear based victim mentality and replaces it with this one, *“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”* **(Romans 8:37)**

This is true for us while we live here. Living in a sin ruined world as Jesus’ people is his will for us. He makes that clear by specifically asking the Father not to remove us from the

world, but to protect us from the evil one. He wants us to remain here, to live here. Jesus doesn't tell us to cloister ourselves away, but to boldly go forth as those kept from the power of evil one, the devil, our actual enemy, against whom we stand united by faith in Jesus' name. Be united and look out for each other's souls. Smack the devil away by invoking Jesus' name. Redirect each other's focus to Jesus, the way to heaven because that's where we're from, just like Jesus. We belong in heaven only because we are made holy by faith in Jesus from the Spirit's work in the Word to believe in God's promises of salvation in Jesus. This is how it works, how it always has, so more of this is exactly what Jesus prays for the Father to do, "*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*" (**John 17:17**) Tall order, right?! We know what we're like. So does Jesus, but Jesus also knows the Father's capacity to forgive and save for his sake is far greater than our ability to sin. Jesus knows that the truth of the gospel sets us free because is God's power for salvation for all who believe, that whenever a person believes, that belief is credited to them by God as righteousness, his gift of grace he wants to give which results in eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

God has saved you and Jesus sends you into the world just like he was. Jesus dedicated his himself, his whole life to you and your eternal life. Jesus came to save sinners, so that's what we're all about, too. Be confident knowing that Jesus himself selected you to do that work. Fan into flame your faith! God didn't give a spirit of timidity, but power when doing his heavenly kingdom work of saving souls. How can you make God's kingdom come to those who are a part of it already? How can you bring people into it? You are set apart by Jesus for this purpose as one set apart by him for heaven. Amen.