Peace I Give You

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[0:00] I've never really thought about that before. Who is Jesus? I've never, I've just never really thought about that. I've never been people being honest and vulnerable.

And the other thing that's kind of happened, of course, in the last few days is you've probably seen that our Prime Minister has issued some advice for us. Hasn't he? He's issued some advice that we should all stockpile three days of water and food and cash and have a wind-up or a battery radio in the event of bad state actors, whatever that means.
It makes me think of some kind of weird Shakespearean play, but it's not that at all. Bad state actors, and you think, oh, gosh, what's kind of happening there, really? And then, unfortunately, I did one of those things that I'm not so sure was a good idea recently as well, because I wanted to start to learn about, because I feel I'm really, really, really far behind the curve in terms of AI, because we keep hearing lots of things about AI, don't we?
And then I listened to a particular speaker who I do like. I was listening to him. I thought, oh, he'll know. He'll know about AI. And then he started to talk about, is AI the new Babel? And I was like, oh, gosh, is AI the new Babel? And he was talking about the Tower of Babel.
For those of you who don't know, that's a story in the book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 11, which you can look at on another occasion. And he was talking about the similarities between Babel and what we're building as AI. And I could feel myself starting to get a bit kind of worried and a bit kind of anxious.
[1:51] And the trouble is, once you've looked at one thing on your phone, isn't it, then lots of things like it come up, don't they? So lots of scary things have started to come up on my phone about AI and about Babel. I'm like, oh, no, this is really scary.

And other people are saying very kind of alarmist things about AI and the end of the world. And I'm like, oh, oh, no. I can feel myself just kind of getting a little bit more anxious as I'm reading these things.
And then, of course, one or two prominent Christian preachers and ministers that you've probably heard of have also made some very kind of alarming kind of announcements, haven't they, about the nation and about what we should be preparing for.
And I'm thinking, and I can feel myself getting worried again, thinking, oh, no, oh, no, there's AI. And now Christians are saying these things as well. And I can feel myself getting a bit kind of anxious then about the present and the future.
I mean, there was even one prophetic word that's been seen so far, but hundreds of thousands of people, this English couple, and they said, you have three years and three months to prepare.
[2:53] And I'm like, oh, prepare for what? Oh, my goodness. I've only got three years and three months to prepare. So, unfortunately, I started to watch their thing. And after about two minutes, I'm thinking, this is not doing me any good at all.

This is not doing me. I could feel my peace kind of seeping away somewhere. And I thought, no, this isn't doing me any good. And you might be like that. You might feel kind of anxiety about the present or you might feel anxiety about the future.
You might have kind of global anxieties like that. Or you might have private anxieties about your life, your children, your grandchildren, your health, your finances.
How do we deal with those things? What should be our posture? What should be our attitude towards kind of global catastrophe, impending AI, personal, private, secret anxieties?
What should our response be to those? Well, our response should always be to be confident in Christ and to be confident in who we are in Christ so that our anxiety doesn't overtake us and worry overtake us.

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[4:06] So what I want to do is I just want us to walk through just three passages of Scripture for us to see who Christ is and why it's important for us to have confidence in him.

Because that then helps us deal with both the present and whatever may come in the future. So let's start at the first book of the Bible, which is the book of Genesis.
And I want us to look at a short paragraph in Genesis and just to notice something in Genesis chapter 1. So we'll look at just one verse, well maybe two.
Genesis chapter 1 and verse 26. And it says this, So God created mankind in his own image.
So I just want you to notice something there. A really important word. Verse 26. Then God said, Let us make mankind in our image.
[5:29] It's us. Did you notice that? Let us in our image. So in other words, who's God talking to? In this passage, who is he talking to?

It's okay, it's not a trick question. It's a real question. And you can answer it. Who's God talking to? Yes. He's talking to his son. He's talking to Jesus.
Isn't he? Let us, here he is, let us, let Jesus, let us make these people in our image. So it's really important, you see, that we have a theology of creation.
We have a theology of the Trinity. This is where it begins, right at the beginning. Because we've got the Spirit of God hovering right at the beginning, don't we? And then we've got God, the Father, saying to Jesus the Son, Let us make man in our image.
So it's important that we understand, Jesus isn't just a prophet. He's not just a good person. Not just a good teacher, but he was right there at the beginning, creating.
[6:37] Creating. So that's where we get the doctrine of what we call the Trinity, because it's here, right at the beginning. And in our image, it's just kind of a beautiful thing, which we haven't got time to talk about now, but sometimes we call that imagio dei, which means in our image.

So that means that we reflect, we literally reflect God. Even those people that you might not like, or the teacher in your school, or that neighbour, or that political character you don't really like, are still made in God's image.
And that helps us to love them, and to see them slightly differently. That we are made in God's image. We're made in God's image to be creative, to be productive, to create ourselves, and be all that God has intended us to be, to be in relationship, and to reflect him in terms of our creativity as well.
So it just kind of helps us. Oh, okay, so Jesus was there right at the beginning. Oh, right, okay. And in case you were wondering about that, now I want you to turn with me to what we call the New Testament, which is much further on, to John's Gospel.
To John's Gospel. There are four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Gospel meaning good news. And the beginning of John's Gospel, in chapter one, we're just going to read the first few verses of John chapter one.
[8:02] Literally we'll read from one to four. Which says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.

And the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made.
In him was life. And that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it.
So again, let's pause, and let's just recap a bit there. Oh, okay. In the beginning was the Word. And then verse two, He was with God in the beginning. So let's, we just need to be really clear about this.
Who, who is the Word? Jesus. That's right. Jesus is the Word. Oh, okay. So Jesus is the Word. Here we are again. He, verse two, He, Jesus, was with God in the beginning.
[9:09] So again, it's really important that we understand this. it was so interesting to me at my Alpha course that there was no question about Jesus being a good person and a good teacher.

But again, the divinity of Christ was a real stumbling block. And even Jesus dying and coming back to life again, the resurrection of Christ was a real stumbling block for my Alpha group.
And so it's got me thinking, we really must be clear about these things, unapologetic about these things, and understand these things ourselves, so that in turn, in our conversations with others, we can help them understand the truth of who Jesus is.

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One of the things I did this week, oh no, it's last week now, in my local secondary school, they invited me to go in to do, please will you come in, this is an interesting question, please will you come in and answer the big questions of life?
I said, the big questions of life? They said, yes. They said, can I know what the questions are beforehand? And they said, no. I thought I was really mean.
[10:18] I was really mean. So I went to face these wonderful teenagers and I'm happy to say they were all really good-humoured and eager. They really wanted to talk about things, but I would just get handed a card and on the card was a big question.

And there were really big questions of life and death, of heaven, of hell, of criminals, and suicide, and murder, and things that they're genuinely just kind of wondering about, really.
I thought, gosh, how interesting. But then slowly and gently to be able to suggest God and point them towards God and point them to Jesus. It's just a really important thing.
Interestingly, I'm just kind of learning about my personal talking to people. Not so much to say, do you believe in God? Do you believe in God? Because that's kind of a closed question, a yes, no, isn't it really?
Yes, no. Or instead, to ask something slightly a bit differently. Say, what do you think about God? Or, what do you think about Jesus? Because then it requires a little bit more thought, doesn't it?
[11:18] A little bit more kind of conversation to see then what people might respond to. But it's really important that we're clear as the image bearers of God, as the image bearers of Christ, who he is, so that when the time comes, we can both display him and communicate him clearly with others.

So, turn with me to Colossians, which is a letter that Paul wrote. The way I remember it is Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.
These are letters that the Apostle Paul wrote to churches, mostly in what we call the Mediterranean Basin. And this was a particular letter that he wrote to the church in Colossia, hence it being called a letter to the Colossians.
And again, I just want you, this is a slightly longer passage, but it's important that we read it and we understand it because again, it helps us understand who Jesus is and again, for us to be confident therefore in who he is.
So, Colossians, chapter 1, verse 15. For God, for the Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
[12:30] For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things and in him all things hold together and he is the head of the body, the church, he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through his blood shed upon a cross.
It just really helps us understand who Jesus is, doesn't it, when we read a passage like that. Oh right, okay. And I love that phrase, all things. If you're ever worried about where God is, is Jesus involved in this?
Am I so worried about AI that Jesus can't surely be involved in all things? It says all things, doesn't it? All things, even AI. I went to a seminar at Wildfires in the summer again to learn about Wildfires is a big Christian festival, 8,000 to 10,000 people in Sussex.
I went to do a seminar which was about the missional opportunities of AI because I just wanted to learn because I'm a bit ignorant really and most of it to be honest with you I didn't understand.
[14:11] It was like it was a completely different language. You know, I don't know who Grok is. I thought it was a person. It's definitely not a person. But it was so interesting to me to hear about how AI has speeded up things like Bible translation that once took years and years now can just take weeks to translate the Bible.

I thought, wow, isn't that fantastic? All things. So Jesus is even using all things like AI. Beverly and I were at a meeting recently, Thursday it was, and Simon, who lives a commissioned church in Southampton, he was telling us about a young man who came to church a few weeks ago, just arrived at the church and Simon said hello to him and said, oh, you know, who are you?

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And Craig, oh, hi Craig, have you been before? No, I haven't been before. Oh, what brings you here? Well, I just wanted to find out about God really. And so Simon chats with him beforehand, has a chat with him afterwards, see how he was, and has a coffee with him in the week, and then the guy had a coffee with someone else, and within a short period, just a few weeks, he's given his life to Christ.
He was intrigued, but then the story comes out, how did he come to church in the first place? Well, the thing is, this is an illustration of all things, he was talking to his car about God, because he's got a Tesla and he's got Grok in his car, so he was talking to his car about God and about Jesus and what he should do, and the car says to him, you should go to Life Church Southampton, and the car, so the car takes him to church.
So his story is, he came to church because his car brought him, all things, it's just, what?
[16:07] God is big, isn't he? Oh, right, all things, oh, okay, all things, all things, so watch out, watch out, the other things that God is going to do. So I just think, oh, it's just so helpful for us, isn't it, when we read stories like this, when we read Colossians, you think, oh, okay, God can use all things, so let's also just kind of fast forward a little bit in terms of Colossians as well, because in terms of where we began in terms of what can be our anxieties, whether that's global anxiety or personal anxiety, because one of the things that's really noticeable about all what we call the pastoral letters, all of Paul's letters, one of the really, really interesting things about how he starts each of his letters, you can look at each of them at home, he says who it's from, Paul, an apostle, and then he says who it's to, in this case, to the church in Colossae, and then what three words, what does he say next, can you remember what he says next in all of his letters?

Grace and peace to you, it's the first thing he says, who it's to, who it's from, grace and peace to you, it's the first thing he says, and then often he says it right at the bottom, at the end, so why is that?
Why is that? The reason for that is, that's what they needed, that's what they needed most, that's what they needed, they needed to know God's grace and his peace, up front, at the start of the letter, and at the end, grace and peace, they lived in very difficult times, often they were facing persecution, uncertainty, difficult, oppression, they were in a land that was being controlled, some of them by the Romans, they weren't really free, and so Paul is saying grace and peace to you, grace and peace, because that's what they, he knew, that's what they needed most, and if we're honest, so do we, don't we?
We need a heavy dose of God's grace, of his goodness, and of his peace in our hearts, don't we? And that's why through the letters, it's one of the common themes, is the peace of Christ.
So when we read a book like Colossians, let's have a look, have a look with me, here we are, chapter 3 and verse 15, what does it say? It says, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.
[18:42] Isn't that helpful? let the peace of Christ come in. In other words, the peace of Christ is waiting to come in. The peace of Christ is waiting to flood your heart.

You don't have to go searching somewhere. Where's the peace of Christ gone? Where's it gone? Is it beyond the pillar? I don't know. Where is the peace of Christ? No, the peace of Christ is waiting to come into you. Let it in. Let the peace of Christ in.
Just let the peace of Christ flood into your heart. Don't let the enemy rob you of your peace. Let it in. Let it rule.
One of the other verses says, let the peace of Christ be your judge. Or another version, let the peace of Christ be your umpire. Let the peace of Christ come in.
It's one of the most beautiful things that Jesus often said to his disciples because he knew they were anxious. He knew they were fearful. One of the last things he said to them, peace I give to you.
[19:44] On another occasion he breathes the Holy Spirit out to them and says, peace to you. And he does the same today for many of us with our very real anxieties, our very real fears and our very real secret worries.

worries. I did a minibus test a little while ago. I just thought that would be a useful thing to do, to get a minibus driving qualification.
Unfortunately, the minibus driving test was at half past eight in our town. And that's just like the worst time, isn't it, to have a minibus test. It's like, oh great.

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And just like any town centre, half past eight. There's lots of traffic, lots of people. Somebody, I remember, I was coming to a chicane, that was it. And you're trying to gauge, oh, there's somebody coming towards me, who's going first.
It's that kind of chicken moment, isn't it? I'm just kind of slowed, let the other guy come. He accelerates towards me, I'm just going to slow a bit more. Coming to another kind of junction, somebody cuts in on me, and I'm just kind of, I'm thinking, gosh, this is really difficult.
[21:00] It's hard enough driving a car at half a second in the morning. Let's have a minibus with all these things. And then we get to the end of the chest, and the lady said this, this is honestly what she said, she looks over to me and she said, I've never seen anything quite like that before.

Honestly, I had no idea what she meant. I was thinking, oh no, I guess that's a fail then. I said, what do you mean? She said, I've never seen anybody so calm before.
And then she said, what is it about you? Do you do yoga? That's honestly what she said. I said, no, I don't do yoga.
I said, I've got something better than yoga. She said, you do? What's that? I said, to you, it's Jesus. Jesus, she said.
So I'll just simply explain. Jesus, to be honest, I can't take any credit. I get stressed, I get anxious, I get worried, like anybody else, but I do find Jesus gives me peace and Jesus helps me even when I'm driving a minibus in rush hour.
[22:16] Because you see, you'll know this, a non-anxious presence speaks powerfully to an anxious world, doesn't it? It just does. Those of you who take Jesus to your place of work, most of the time you can't say anything, and most of the time you don't need to say anything, because the peace of Christ rests on you.

So when you're in the hospital, or you're in the staff room, or you're going to your place of work, wherever that might be, your life speaks. The peace of Christ that's in you speaks.
what we've just read is on you, and you carry it as part of the image of God, the unique image of God, Christ in you, is your peace.
Your non-anxious presence speaks powerfully to an anxious world. Let's look at one more before we finish.
This is important, isn't it, because you were called to peace. two This is just one I read yesterday, because I'm in my own readings, and I just thought, I must tell you about it, because I was so excited about it, in two Thessalonians.
[23:28] Two Thessalonians. The reason there's one Thessalonians and two Thessalonians, because he wrote one letter, one Thessalonians, and then he wrote another one, two Thessalonians, a bit like part two.

And then right at the end, here's the final greetings of two Thessalonians. So this is 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 16, and he says this, Now, now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.
I'll read that again. Now, may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.
So here's what we're going to do now. I just want you to be honest with Jesus right now about what you're worried about.
We'll all be worried about something, you might have a list, you might say, where do I start, Mark? What is it you're worried about? Where is your point of anxiety, your secret worry?
[25:04] What is it? And I'm so confident in Jesus, I'm so confident in Jesus that he's going to do what we've just read for you now.

Right now, you will know his peace, that the peace of Christ will flood your heart right now. I'm that confident in Jesus.
Jesus. So this is just a few minutes, just for you, just for you, where you are. You know how to do this, most of you, you can sit, you can kneel, you can stand, whatever you want to do to talk to Jesus and lay it before him.
You might have prayed about it before, well that's okay, he's very patient and loving and kind and generous and wants us to come again. I'm worried about this Jesus, whatever phrase you want to use, lay it before him again, just tell him about it and then listen to what he has to say to you about it.

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This might be the first time that you've done this, this might be the first time that you've talked to Jesus in this way, so please try, just try, as you would talk to a friend, your mum or your dad, just quietly under your breath, talk to Jesus, he's right here, he's with us and tell him about your anxiety, what you're worried about and see what happens next.
[26:40] Okay? Off you go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go.

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Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Thank you.
Thank you.
[28:15] Thank you.

Thank you.
Enlarge your borders. Enlarge your borders. And I see a picture of Nadia. I see her reach extending. Her reach extending.
Not just across Alton and the surrounding villages, but across the region and the nation and the commission world as well.
That's part of your call as a church. And as a simple picture of that, if you are here this morning and you're from a different nation, you would say that your home is a different nation.
[29:52] You're here now and this is your home, but you feel like your home is a different nation. You've come from a different nation. Please will you stand right now? Because there'll be quite a few of you.

I don't need to be shy. Please will you stand? Great. So, Tim and the staff team, I just want you to look around now and see this is part of your call to bless the nations.
Because the nations are present. God has brought the nations to you for you to bless them and for them to be a blessing to you.
This is part of your parish is these nations represented. And I feel like there's going to be both an increase in the richness of nations here, but the nations, not just that God brings to you as Harvest Church Alton, but that you bless because of that and beyond.
And I feel like God for you as a team, as a staff team, but as a church, I feel like he just wants to broaden you and increase you for that.
[31:05] I'm just going to wait just a minute longer. Please stay standing if you're standing.

I think you know those of you who are standing, but I'm going to say it to you again. You are so loved and you are so welcome.
This church loves you. We love you. And you are so, so welcome. We are so glad that you are here.

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