



## **FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT**

### **8 August - PEACE & FAITHFULNESS**

#### **PEACE**

##### **Isaiah 65:17-19,21-25**

<sup>17</sup> 'See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

<sup>21</sup> They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup> No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. <sup>23</sup> They will not labour in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. <sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,' says the LORD.

In this vision, peace is much more than the absence of war, though in so many places that would be an essential prerequisite of this kind of deep peace. Similarly our own lives may be blighted by all kinds of problems - health, stress, busyness, finance, grief etc - that prevent our being 'at peace'.

True peace can only develop for nations or individuals out of a desire to honour all creation. The Hebrew word *shalom* means peace, but peace in which there is wholeness and integrity, righteousness and justice. So when Jesus said *Blessed are the peacemakers* (Matthew 5:9), he was commending an attitude or approach to life that is hardly peaceful for those involved - think of the wear and tear, and sheer frustration of 'shuttle diplomacy'.

For Paul, peace is especially associated with God and his relationship to his people. It is particularly a community matter - so Christ, our peace, has brought Jew and Gentile together in one body (Eph 2:14-17) and together they are to make every effort to do what leads to peace (Rom 14:19) - see Fee p448-9.

- What might we do to improve peace and wholeness in our own lives?

- What added dimensions are needed to apply this to Church life?
- How might the churches better influence the world for peace?

## **FAITHFULNESS**

### **Matthew 25:1-13**

Jesus said, <sup>1</sup> 'At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup> The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> The bride-groom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

<sup>6</sup> At midnight the cry rang out: "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" <sup>7</sup> Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out." <sup>9</sup> "No," they replied, "there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves." <sup>10</sup> But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bride-groom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

<sup>11</sup> Later the others also came. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us!" <sup>12</sup> But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I don't know you." <sup>13</sup> Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Faithfulness is more than having faith - it is holding to that faith, often for a long time, often in adverse circumstances. In the ultimate it may involve being *faithful unto death*, just as Jesus was. The martyrs in Revelation 7 have *washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb* and are free of any further suffering.

For most of us faithfulness will be demonstrated in more everyday situations. Although the parable of the ten bridesmaids has elements of artificiality, the main message is a simple one - that doing what is expected doesn't require feats of endurance - just doing the job in the best possible way, being prepared, and being committed.

As in many other ways Paul expects Christians to display the attributes of God, so the fruit of faithfulness is a response to God's own faithfulness - a 'basic stance towards God of utter trust in his trustworthiness' (Fee p451). The faith on which this faithfulness is built is the truth of the Gospel Paul proclaimed - the foolishness of the cross of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:18).

- How would you distinguish faith and faithfulness?
- In what ways might we be more faithful to the Gospel in our own lives?
- How might the church be more faithful to the Gospel?

Quotations from Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1994.