

THE PEACE THAT CHRIST GIVES

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14:27.

These are musical words, but the music is not of earth alone. They touch a strain above the world. If there is any word which can excite pleasing sensations in the human breast, it is the word peace. These words of Jesus steal upon our ears like a strain of heavenly music, ravishing in its beauty, but, we sometimes feel, remote from our present life, ethereal, intangible, and unreal. From time immemorial man has longed for peace, sought peace, lived for peace, fought for peace, and died for peace. This text turns our attention to the peace we all yearn for and seek after in our own individual lives. We all long for tranquillity, to be able to face every issue of life calmly and serenely. We long for peace, we wish for peace, we plan for peace, and we pray for peace, but Christ is the only one who can give peace. A congregation never meets for worship but what there are some present who need to learn the secret of true serenity. "Never morning wore to evening, but some heart did break" for lack of the very thing which Christ is so eager to bestow.

At the close of the earthly ministry of Jesus, when the forces opposed to Him were wild with fury and the conflict was approaching its darkest and most desolate hour, He gathered the little company of His apostles about Him in the upper room, and after much patient teaching He ended His discourse with the words of our text. The great storm is gathering, the vast shadows lie thick upon the earth, the catastrophe is impending. The crisis may come with startling and trying suddenness. The cross was standing in the background. Every step He took brought Him nearer to it. The Prince of Peace was just about to experience the betrayal by trusted friends, the desertion of those who had sworn allegiance unto death, the savage insults of a fickle rabble, the lying calumnies of false accusers, the bitter mockery of brutal men, the shameless delivery of innocence to the murderers, the agony of sin, and the bitter pain of a horrible death.

The apostles knew Jesus was about to leave them, and that they had to face a cruel and bitterly hostile world. He had been lifting the veil a little, and was about to lift it more and show them how the world would treat them. The little band of lovers stand in the sorrow of an unutterable grief. What a vision of blessedness these words must have given them! For three years they had been associated with Jesus, and although His life had been full of strenuous work, they had seen clearly and continually that His heart was ruled by the peace of God. He was never victimized by outward circumstances, never rendered impatient, anxious, or rebellious by them. On all occasions He was their Master and Lord. Many times they had wondered at His calmness, His absolute self-control and self-mastery. While their hearts were heavy and filled with sorrow at the thought of His leaving them, no shadow of disturbance rested upon Him. Surely the disciples must have wondered at His calmness in contrast with their own grief. Throughout His ministry Jesus manifested a calmness of Mind that was independent of circumstances and undisturbed by outward things. Even as He spoke the words of the text, He knew that in the city streets men were plotting to take His life. Among them was one of His disciples, willing to be the instrument of betrayal. The desertion of His disciples, the agony of Gethsemane, His unjust trial, and the anguish of the cross were immediately before Him. He did not try to avoid the designs of His enemies. He was not concerned about Himself, but thought of His poor, bewildered, and discouraged followers, whom He sought to calm and reassure by bequeathing His peace to them.

What is peace? Peace is a condition. The fundamental thought in the word is that of harmony with the will of God and with the law of God. Some count other things for peace. For example, the lazy man thinks peace consists in having nothing to do; the busy man in having plenty to do; the needy man thinks it lies in a good income; the rich man in having much more than he can use. We shall never get men, apart from the Gospel of Christ, to agree on any definition of peace or wherein it lies. No soul

can be at peace at the roots of his being until he is reconciled to God. There is a deep inward conflict going on prior to that. The soul is agitated, the mind is ill at ease, the heart aches for something that wealth cannot buy.

When Jesus was about to say good-bye to those He had loved so tenderly, and who loved Him with a love unlike that which they had felt for any other being in the world, He was trying to prepare them for an event of whose possibility they could hardly conceive, His own departure from them, under the most trying and painful kind of circumstances. In a soft and tender voice He unveiled the divine love. He set the great hopes aglowing in the darkened sky. He saw the struggle, but He girded them for it. He measured the whole extent of their grief, but He sent them to meet it in the power of the love of God.

In our Saviour's calmness and triumphancy we have a most vivid illustration of the contrast between the external and the internal life. His peace was not peace from the outward pains that beset life. It was not the peace of an easy life. It was a spiritual peace -- peace in the deep region of the spirit. This peace of spirit came from His oneness with God. Sorrows, deeper than we can fathom, broke over Him; a cup more bitter than we can conceive was given Him to drink; yet He was at peace. What was the secret of it? He was in perfect harmony with the will of God. Christ's peace is the peace of an inward security, independent and untouched, by the mere favours of men or the honors of the world. It is a spiritual peace, based on a conscious fellowship with God, of doing His will, of a trust in Him that whatever life may bring, God rules, and overrules, to the highest interests of those who rest in Him.

It is a peace that is independent of the most disturbing circumstances. The world may be riven by strife, and yet the Christian can be serene and happy at heart. Why? Because his peace is not dependent upon the condition of the world, or dictated by the the world, but by his dependence on God and the right relationship of his heart to Him. As the needle in the compass never stands still until it points to the North Pole, so the heart of man never finds rest and peace until they are found in Christ.

Jesus Christ is the real author and source of peace. The peace which He wants His disciples to enjoy is that which characterized Him; the same serenity in danger, the same equanimity in troublous circumstances, the same freedom from anxiety about results, the same speedy recovery of composure. Peace is superior to outward circumstances. It is the most valuable blessing one can enjoy on earth, that is, peace with God. When the blessed Redeemer was bidding His disciples farewell as they stood around Him in speechless sorrow, peace was the gift which He singled out, above all others, to bestow upon them as a parting legacy. He, who was the Lord of all, had the whole universe out of which to choose a gift for them in that hour of parting tenderness, and the gift which He fixed upon as the most precious to them in their hour of dire need was peace with God. This peace is the only real support amid the trials and sorrows of life. The man who has this peace can meet earthly trials not only calm and undaunted, but rejoicing in all the appointments of His heavenly Father. In fact, the earth does not have an ill for which Jesus does not have a cure.

Christ never promised His followers an easy way, a release from burdens, freedom from discouragements, from temptations, or from obstacles. He frankly told His disciples that they could expect hardship, persecution, and even death for loyalty to Him. But He very definitely promised them quiet strength to bear their burdens, a new spirit to meet discouragement, adequate reenforcement to withstand temptation, available power to overcome obstacles; all of these are included in Jesus' legacy of peace. In the world there is and will be tribulation, but in Jesus Christ there is peace.

Christ's legacy of peace is the most precious of gifts, an inheritance which the world can neither give nor take away. This peace includes peace of conscience, peace of character, and peace of trust. There is peace in a conscience relieved from guilt, reconciled to God, and restored to its rightful supremacy. There is peace in a character brought into order and harmony, in which the disquieting power of worldly lusts -- pride, selfishness, evil temper, and unworthy feelings -- has given place to the reign of nobler principles and purer affections. There is peace in that trust and confidence in God which casts all care upon Him, simply relies upon His promises, leaves all things in His hands, and is sure that He does all things well. Each one of these elements of peace is the gift of Christ and from Him they all proceed. We all long to be able to face every issue of life calmly and serenely. We cannot hope to win it or create it for ourselves. What Jesus said to His disciples in that upper room, He is still saying to His followers and friends.

Here is a sublime contrast -- "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." No, never. The contrast is vivid and vast in all respects. What Christ gives and what the world gives profoundly differ, in the manner of giving and in the things given. He does not give as the world gives, nor what it gives. The motive is different, and the matter is different. "Not as the world giveth" -- not the peace of ease, but of struggle; not of self-content, but of self-sacrifice; not of yielding to evil, but of conflict with it; not of accommodation to the world, but by the subjugation of it.

How does Christ give this peace? He gives it to us by bringing us to the same source whence He had it Himself -- by bringing us to God, by making us one with God, and so bringing us into harmony with the true law of the Spirit's life. God grant that each of you may know and enjoy that peace.