

## SUNDAY MORNING NO. 289

It is noteworthy how the mere reading of the Scriptures produces the effect of peace in the mind. Peace belongs to God: hence Paul's wish that "*the peace of God that passeth all understanding should fill the hearts and minds*" of believers. Peace is the aim of all His work and the end of all His ways. Whether with saint or sinner, righteousness or wickedness—peace in one shape or other is the finish: the peace of glory or the peace of death. Rough are the methods of getting at it sometimes, but the end is sure and the aim steady. "*Peace on earth and goodwill among men*" will come at the last, as the result of all that is going on. The children of God are the children of peace: if they contend earnestly for the faith, it is not that they love contention, but because of man's opposition to the conditions of peace. It is not that they love strife: far from it.

*"The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men" (2 Tim. 2:24).*

Peace and peace-making are entirely in their line: so entirely that Jesus fixes on this feature as their characteristic:

*"Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God."*

He himself has for one of his titles, "*the Prince of Peace*." He did not belie this title when he said, "*I came not to send peace, but a sword*": when he spoke thus, he was foretelling the result of his advent among men, in dividing them into parties with regard to himself. In the circle of his own influence there could be nothing but peace:

*"In me ye shall have peace."*

*"My peace I leave unto you."*

His disciples were to look out for men of peace in forming their associations:

*"When ye salute a house, if the son of peace be there, there abide," but if not, "let your peace return to you."*

*"Blessed are **the meek**"*—the MEEK—"for they shall inherit the earth." We all know the qualities of the meek as contrasted with those of the noisy, the brawling, the self-assertive, the proud, the arrogant, the boastful, the unmerciful. Jesus declared himself one of them: "*I am meek and lowly of heart*." He had said, "*learn of me*," and also "*ye shall find rest unto your souls*." We must not forget these things, because we have learnt that Christendom is astray. We shall be astray too if with an understanding of true doctrine we are not men of meekness and peace. Men of God are lovers of peace. The children of the devil are not so: they are "lovers of debate," and never in such high feather as when there is some cause of dispeace in motion. Born fighters and brawlers are all men more or less, but some are tamed. We see the untamed propensity in its highest development on the battlefield. The thing is glossed over in fine descriptions that almost make war a beautiful thing. The children of sin are in their highest glory in killing and wounding and destroying, and reserve their highest praises for those who excel the most in the diabolic art. There is, of course, a divine side to the work of destruction: for it is God's prerogative to destroy as well as create: to take vengeance as well as to show mercy, but the meek of the earth, for whose salvation God will arise in His great and terrible might in due time (Psa. 76:9) are under an interdict for the time being. They are forbidden to use violence or resist evil. They are commanded to suffer injury without retaliation, and even to do good to those who afflict them. It is only the children of the devil that are to be found with carnal weapons on the field of battle. There is a war they

have to wage, but it is in another line of things. Their fight is not with material flesh and blood, but with *“imagination and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Cor. 10:5). This is *“a good fight,”* not a bad one, which the devil’s fights are: and to succeed well in it we have to *“put on the whole armour of God”*—which will not fit the devil at all: for what care the children of the flesh for the gird of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of hope, the sandals of the gospel of peace, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God? (Eph. 6:13-17).

This is the form of war that is not inconsistent with our being the children of peace. On the contrary, it helps us to be the children of peace, for the war is directed against things in ourselves and others that tend to break the peace. The peace that is secured by this war is a peace that bears in various directions. There is, first of all, peace with God. Paul says that *“being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* This is a peace that the children of this world know nothing about: because they know nothing of the distress, of the dispeace of being at enmity with Him. Their conscience is in the state described by Peter as being *“seared as with a hot iron.”* In this state, men have no feeling of distress on account of their separation from God, and therefore, no appreciation of the proffered reconciliation through Christ. When the Word of God comes powerfully home to the mind, distress comes, because we are made to realise our position as mere tolerated sinners—and tolerated only for a time—*“alienated and enemies in our mind by wicked works”* (Col. 1:21). But let the Word of God go far enough, and it brings peace; for the preaching of the Word is the preaching of peace.

*“He came and preached peace”—peace by forgiveness and reconciliation: for “through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.”*

We are directed to look at his life and death as the bitten children of Israel were directed to look at the uplifted serpent in the wilderness and live. We are told concerning that life and death that *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them”*: that he died *“that he might reconcile both (Jew and Gentile) unto God in one body by the cross”* (2Cor.5: 19; Eph. 2:16). The result is to give us peace in *“repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”* This is a great peace which is as oil in a man’s bones all the days of his life. If a man is at peace with God he is inside a bulwark that protects him from dispeace in all other directions. He can triumphantly enquire with Paul, *“If God be for us, who can be against us?”* or utter a hearty *“Amen!”* to David’s declaration, *“Great peace have they that love thy law: nothing shall them offend.”*

Then there is peace towards the brethren. Jesus enjoined this.

*“Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace one with another.”*

This almost follows. It certainly follows among all who are truly at peace with God: for as John says, *“He that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.”* If two men love God, however much strangers they may be to one another, you have only to bring them together to have two men who will love one another (and love always brings peace). This is how it will be with thousands at the resurrection who never even heard of one another: in different ages they were conformed to a common divine likeness, and the consequence is when they come together, they fuse like drops of water. How complete, how sweet, how lasting is the peace that reigns among men who are all at peace with God. Give them only a common incorruptibility of nature that will exclude the possibility of weariness or death, and

their peace is perfect peace that will never be disturbed. This is the peace to which we ultimately stand related in the gospel.

But it does not exhaust the peace of God that belongs to probation. We have not only peace with the brethren, but peace with all men—and peace even with our enemies. This may seem to contradict the statement that “*in the world, ye shall have tribulation,*” but it is “seem” only. The tribulation arises from the hostility of evil men towards ourselves: this we cannot avoid and cannot prevent. But it is not our side of the question. It is the side that belongs to evil men. Our side is how we feel towards them. This is a different side altogether. Christ was a man of sorrow through the oppositions of evil men: but as for his attitude to them, he prayed for them:

*“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

Righteous men suffer at the hands of evil men, but they have none of the vindictive feelings that evil men bear to one another. They do not nurse anger. They do not plot revenge. They are ready even to do them a good turn if they can get the opportunity. They leave them entirely in God’s hands. In this sense, they are at peace with all men; and they reap an advantage from it, for as it is written, “*The merciful man doeth good to his own soul,*” whereas, “*envy slayeth the silly one.*”

There is a fourth item in the peace that comes with the truth, which is very important: we are at peace with ourselves—I mean each man at peace with himself. This is the meaning of the answer of a good conscience. When a man is enlightened with regard to what God requires of him, and knows that he is daily rendering what is so required, he is at peace in himself. This is a peace, as Jesus said, that the world cannot give: it is usual to add, “and cannot take away,” but Jesus did not say this. It would only be true in a sense. The world certainly cannot take away the peace that righteousness may give, but it may take it away by interfering with those conditions from which peace springs. We are in danger from this interference so long as we are not in the kingdom. Peter speaks of those who, after having “*escaped the pollutions of the world,*” are “*again entangled therein and overcome.*” But while the world in this sense may take away peace, it cannot give it. “Vanity and vexation of spirit” is a true description of its ultimate effects on all who yield themselves to its service. The truth can give peace, and in this peace, it can preserve a man amid all the troubles and turmoils of life: not that he will never know trouble. A righteous man cannot be in this present evil world without knowing trouble: but there is a trouble that is outside and a trouble that is inside—as regards causes. Christ’s troubles were great, but they were all outside: inside, peace was his experience: “*My peace*” as he called it. So it will be with his brethren. They may know trouble among men, but in their own hearts towards God, peace reigns.

But even this peace is a thing of conditions; and it is the conditions we have to watch. When have we the greatest peace? Is it not when we see the most clearly and believe the most heartily the things declared to us by the truth? It is the vivid sense of those “things” that imparts peace. When we strongly remember “*that God is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*”: that Christ rose from the dead and ever lives to make intercession for us: and that to them that look for him, he will at last appear for their salvation, we cannot keep experiencing the state of mind we mean by peace. Our peace is endangered when we allow anything to come between our eyes and a discernment of these things. When the vision grows dim, peace grows faint. Preserve the vision in its brightness in reading, prayer, and meditation. Speaking literally, it means the steady recognition of facts. The truth does not consist of fancies, nor does its discernment come from shouting or smiting the breast, or getting up excitement. Truth is a quiet thing of which the understanding lays hold. It consists of many elements which all have their place. The difficulty is to give them

that place. It can be done, but not without effort. It is not by keeping foolish company and reading foolish books, and indulging foolish habits, that wisdom is to be preserved, but by the reverse of all these. It is by keeping our eyes on facts that we may remain wise, and by learning to judge between appearances and realities. The present life is but an appearance. It consists of so many pulsations of the heart, so many rushes of the blood, and then all is over. But for the time being, it seems a reality, and most people live under the power of this impression.

The life to come is a reality that will never fade, but for the time being it seems an affair of the imagination. Here is where intelligence comes in and discerns between reality and appearance. Paul expresses the idea very neatly when he says,

*“We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are but temporal (that is, short lived); but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

The question is, how do we know? And the answer is plain. We know the one by experience, and the other by authentic information. Life as it now is, we know to be a shadow—a flower that blooms and withers and dies. We experience this. It is no matter of sentimentality to note it, but a matter of simple knowledge, which a man is a fool to leave out of account. On the other hand, we know, by evidence that cannot be destroyed, that Christ lives, and that earth’s futurity is bound up with his reappearance. It is no matter of mawkish piety to recognise this, but the simple exercise of reason in the discernment of evidence which a man is less than half-educated to ignore.

Six times in our reading this morning, we have the expression, “*Thus saith the Lord God of Hosts.*” Two thousand times this book says, “*Thus saith the Lord.*” Are these two thousand lies? It is impossible. The book is not a lying book, or a romancing book, or a bad book in any sense. It is a book of purity, holiness, righteousness, and truth. The mere passing of it through the mind in reading it is like flushing the sewers with clean water. The mere character of the book is a guarantee of its truth, quite apart from other evidence. Therefore the mere iteration of this statement that what it says is as “*Thus saith the Lord,*” is evidence that we are dealing with no traditions and fancies or fictions of any kind, in dealing with its great and precious promises of good things to come.

But the thing is open to test. The book is an old book. It is at the lowest 1800 years old—I mean that beyond the utmost contradiction of the most ingenious or sublime bubble-blowing higher critic, it is nearly 2000 years since the last page of it was written. A book of such an age is open to more than one test, and through them all it passes triumphantly. If this book is truly a “*Thus-saith-the-Lord*” book, there ought to be scattered Jews, and there they are. There ought to be a desolate Palestine, and there it is. There ought to be a non-existent Babylon on the banks of the Euphrates: her solitary ruins any man may behold who goes there. There ought to be a non-imperial but existent Egypt, and there it is. There ought to be a Christendom astray, believing lies—and there it is. There ought to be a head to it, claiming divinity, seated on the seven hills of Rome, and there it is: but his power to prevail should now be at an end—and lo, it is so. Palestine should be reviving, and so it is. The power of the sea should be in the hand of an island merchant power, and we know it is so. The French should be the political disturbers of Europe, and so they have been for a hundred years. England should be in Egypt and so she is. There should be a people watching for the Lord’s return, and so there is.

In fact, there is no test that can be applied but yields the same result, namely, that the Bible is as “*Thus saith the Lord*”: and that, therefore, we are not following cunningly-devised

fables in trusting to its great and precious promises of resurrection and unspeakable good things to come in the day when the Lord of Hosts makes to all people a feast of fat things—abolishing death and drying tears.

What is the application of all these facts but the one formulated for us by Paul in the third portion of the day's reading:

*“Therefore we ought to give **the more earnest heed** to the **THINGS WHICH WE HAVE HEARD**, lest at any time we let them slip.”*

Let us keep close to the Bible things. Let us avoid everything that would hide them from our view. Let us keep clear of men, and things, and books, and ways, that would weaken our hold on them. Thus shall we preserve the peace of God with which the truth can fill the heart and mind; and be helped in the attainment of that everlasting peace which awaits the sons of peace in the day of Jerusalem's exaltation, when God “*will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of the Gentiles like a flowing stream.*”

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