**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**2 THESSALONIANS-005**. **THE LORD OF PEACE AND THE PEACE OF THE LORD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Now the Lord of Peace Himself give you peace always, by all means. The Lord be with you all."*

*2 Thessalonians 3:16*

We have reached here the last of the brief outbursts of prayer which characterise this letter, and bear witness to the Apostle's affection for his Thessalonian converts. It is the deepening of the ordinary Jewish formula of meeting and parting. We find that, in most of his letters, the Apostle begins with wishing grace and peace, and closes with an echo of the wish. Peace be unto you was often a form which meant nothing. But true religion turns conventional insincerities into real, heartfelt desires. It was often a wish destined to remain unfulfilled. But loving wishes are potent when they are changed into petitions.

The relation between the two clauses of my text seems to be that the second, The Lord be with you all, is not so much a separate, additional supplication as rather the fuller statement, in the form of prayer, of the means by which the former supplication is to be accomplished. The Lord of Peace gives peace by giving His own presence. This, then, is the supreme desire of the Apostle, that Christ may be with them all, and in His presence they may find the secret of tranquillity.

**I. The deepest longing of every human soul is for peace.**

There are many ways in which the supreme good may be represented, but perhaps none of them is so lovely, and exercises such universal fascination of attraction, as that which presents it in the form of rest. It is an eloquent testimony to the unrest which tortures every heart that the promise of peace should to all seem so fair. It may be presented and aimed at in very ignoble and selfish ways. It may be sought for in cowardly shirking of duty, in sluggish avoidance of effort, in selfish absorption, apart from all the miseries of mankind. It may be sought for in the ignoble paths of mere pleasure, amidst the sanctities of human love, amidst the nobilities of intellectual effort and pursuit. But all men in their workings are aiming at rest of spirit, and only in such rest does blessedness lie. There is no joy but calm. It is better than all the excitements of conflict, and better than the flush of victory. Best which is not apathy, rest which is not indolence, rest which is contemporaneous with, and the consequence of, the full wholesome activity of the whole nature in its legitimate directions, that is the good that we are all longing for. The sea is not stagnant, though it be calm. There will be the slow heave of the calm billow, and the wavelets may sparkle in the sunlight, though they be still from all the winds that rave. Deep in every human heart, in yours and mine, brother, is this cry for rest and peace. Let us see to it that we do not mistranslate the meaning of the longing, or fancy that it can be found in the ignoble, the selfish, the worldly ways to which I have referred. We want, most of all, peace in our inmost hearts.

**II. Then the second thing to be suggested here is that the Lord of Peace Himself is the only giver of peace.**

I suppose I may take for granted, on the part at least of the members of my own congregation, some remembrance of a former discourse upon another of these petitions, in which I pointed out how, in phraseology analogous to that of my text, there were the distinct reference to the divinity of Jesus Christ, the distinct presentation of prayer to Him, the implication of His present activity upon Christian hearts.

And here again we have the august and majestic Himself. Here again we have the distinct reference of the title Lord to Jesus. And here again we have plainly prayer to Him.

But the title by which He is addressed is profoundly significant, The Lord of Peace. Now we find, in another of Paul's letters, in immediate conjunction with His teaching, that casting all our care upon God is the sure way to bring the peace of God into our hearts, the title the God of Peace; and he employs the same phraseology in another of his letters, when he prays that the God of Peace would fill the Roman Christians with all joy and peace in believing.

So, then, here is a title which is all but distinctively divine. The Lord of Peace is brought into parallelism and equality with the God of Peace; which were blasphemy unless the underlying implication was that Jesus Christ Himself was divine.

He is the Lord of Peace because that tranquillity of heart and spirit, that unruffled calm which we all see from afar, and long to possess, was verily His, in His manhood, during all the calamities and changes and activities of His earthly life. I have said that peace is not apathy, that it is not indifference, that it is not self-absorption. Look at the life of the Lord of Peace. In Him there were wholesome human emotions. He sorrowed, He wept, He wondered, He was angry, He pitied, He loved. And yet all these were perfectly consistent with the unruffled calm which marked His whole career. So peace is not stolid indifference, nor is it to be found in the avoidance of difficult duties, or the cowardly shirking of sacrifices and pains and struggles; but rather it is peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation, of which the great example stands in Him who was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, and who yet, in it all, was the Lord of Peace.

Why was Christ's manhood so perfectly tranquil? The secret lies here. It was a manhood in unbroken communion with the Father. And what was the secret of that unbroken communion with the Father? It lies here, in the perfect submission of His will. Resignation is peace. The surrender of self-will is peace. Obedience is peace. Trust is peace, and fellowship with the divine is peace. So Christ has taught us in His life--The Father hath not left Me alone, because I do always the things that please Him. And therein He has marked out for us the path of righteousness and communion, which is ever the path of peace. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee. That is the secret of the tranquillity of the ever-calm Christ.

Being thus the Lord of Peace, inasmuch as it was His own constant and unbroken possession, He is the sole giver of it to others.

Ah! brethren, our hearts want far more, for their stable restfulness, than we can find in any hand, or in any heart, except those of Jesus Christ Himself. For what do we need? We need, in order that we should know the sweetness of repose, an adequate object for every part of our nature. If we find something that is good and sweet and satisfying for some portion of this complex being of ours, all its other hungry desires are apt to be left unappeased. So we are shuttle-cocked from one wish to another, and bandied about from one partial satisfaction to another, and in them all it is but segments of our being that are satisfied, whilst all the rest of the circumference remains disquieted. We need that, in one attainable and single object, there shall be at once that which will subjugate the will, that which will illuminate and appease the conscience, that which will satisfy the seeking intellect, and hold forth the promise of endless progress in insight and knowledge, that which will meet all the desires of our ravenous clamant nature, and that which will fill every creek and cranny of our empty hearts as with the flashing brightness of an inflowing tide.

And where shall we find all these, but in one dear heart, and where shall we discern the one object, whom, possessing, we have enough; and without whom, possessing all beside, we are mendicants and starving? Where, but in that dear Lord, who Himself will supply all our needs, and will minister to us peace, because for will and conscience and intellect and affections and desires He supplies the pabulum that they require, and gives more than enough for their satisfaction?

We want, if we are to be at rest, that there shall be some absolute control over our passions, lusts, desires, which torture us for ever, as long as they are ungoverned. There is only one hand which will take the wild beasts of our nature, bind them in the silken leash of His love, and lead them along, tamed and obedient.

We want, for our peace, that all our relations with circumstances and men around us shall be rectified. And who is there that can bring about such harmony between us and our surroundings that calamities shall not press upon us with their heaviest weight, nor opposing circumstances kindle angry resistance, but only patient perseverance and thankful persistence in the path of duty? It is only Christ that can regulate our relations to the things and the men around us, and make all things work together to our consciousness for our good.

Further, if we are to be at rest, and possess any true, fundamental, and stable tranquillity, we want that our relations with God shall consciously be rectified and made blessed. And I, for my part, do not believe that any man comes into the full sweetness of an assured friendship with God, unless he comes to it by the road of faith in that Saviour in whom God draws near to us with tenderness in His heart, and blessings dropping from His open Hands. To be at peace with God is the beginning of all true tranquillity, and that can be secured only by faith in Jesus Christ.

So, because He brings the reconciliation between man and God, because He brings the rectification of our relation to circumstances and men, because He brings the control of desires and passions and inclinations, and because He satisfies all the capacities of our natures, in Him, and in Him only, is there peace for us.

**III. So note, thirdly, that the peace of the Lord of Peace is perfect.**

Give you peace always, that points to perpetual, unbroken duration in time, and through all changing circumstances which might threaten a less stable and deeply-rooted tranquillity. And then, by all means, as our Authorised Version has it, or, better, in all ways, as the Revised Version reads, the reference being, not so much to the various manners in which the divine peace is to be bestowed, as to the various aspects which that peace is capable of assuming. Christ's peace, then, is perpetual and multiform, unbroken, and presenting itself in all the aspects in which tranquillity is possible for a human spirit.

It is possible, then, thinks Paul, that there shall be in our hearts a deep tranquillity, over which disasters, calamities, sorrows, losses, need have no power. There is no necessity why, when my outward life is troubled, my inward life should be perturbed. There may be light in the dwellings of Goshen, while darkness lies over all the land of Egypt. The peace which Christ gives is no exemption from warfare, but is realised in the midst of warfare. It is no immunity from sorrows, but is then most felt when the storm of sorrow beating upon us is patiently accepted. The rainbow steadfastly stands spanning the tortured waters of the cataract. The fire may burn, like that old Greek fire, beneath the water. The surface may be agitated, but the centre may be calm. It is not calamity that breaks our peace, but it is the resistance of our wills to calamity which troubles us. When we can bow and submit and say, Thy will be done, it seemeth good to Thee, do as Thou wilt, then nothing can break the peace of God in our hearts. We seek in the wrong quarter for peace when we seek it in the disposition of outward things according to our wills. We seek in the right way when we seek it in the disposition of our wills according to the will of the Father manifest in our circumstances. There may be peace always, even whilst the storms, efforts, and calamities of life are in full operation around us and on us. That peace may be uninterrupted and uniform, extended on one high level, as it were through all our lives. It is not so with us, dear brethren; there are ups and downs which are our own fault. The peace of God may be permanent, but, in order that it should be, there must be permanent communion and permanent obedience.

Further, says the Apostle, Christ's peace will not manifest itself in one form only, but in all the shapes in which peace is possible. There are many enemies that beset this calmness of spirit; for them all there is the appropriate armour and defence in the peace of God, I have already enumerated in part some of the requirements for true and permanent tranquillity of soul. All these are met in the peace of Christ. Whatever it is that disturbs men, He has His anodyne that will soothe. If circumstances threaten, if men array themselves against us, if our own evil hearts rise up in rebellion, if our passions disturb us, if our consciences accuse: for all these Christ brings tranquillity and calm. In every way in which men can be disturbed, and in every way, therefore, in which peace can be manifest, Christ's gift avails. Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

**IV. Lastly, the Lord of Peace gives it by giving His own presence.**

The Thessalonians, as they listened to Paul's first prayer, might think to themselves, Always, by all means. That is a large petition! Can it be fufilled? And so the Apostle adds, The Lord be with you all. You cannot separate Christ's gifts from Christ. The only way to get anything that He gives is to get Him. It is His presence that does everything. If He is with me, the world's annoyances will seem very small. If I hold His hand I shall not be much troubled. If I can only nestle close to His side, and come under His cloak, He will shield me from the cold blast, from whatever side it blows. If my heart is twined around Him it will partake of the stability and calm of the great heart on which it rests.

The secret of tranquillity is the presence of Christ. When He is in the vessel the waves calm themselves. So, Christian men and women, if you and I are conscious of breaches of our restfulness, interruptions of our tranquillity by reason of surging, impatient passions, and hot desires within ourselves, or by reason of the pressure of outward circumstances, or by reason of our having fallen beneath our consciences, and done wrong things, let us understand that the breaches of our peace are not owing to Him, but only to our having let go His hand. It is our own faults if we are ever troubled; if we kept close to Him we should not be. It is our own faults if the world ever agitates us beyond the measure that is compatible with central calm. Sorrow should not have the power to touch the citadel of our lives. Effort should not have the power to withdraw us from our trustful repose in Him. And nothing here would have the power, if we did not let our hand slip out of His, and break our communion with Him.

So, dear brethren, in the world ye shall have tribulation, in Me ye shall have peace. Keep inside the fortress and nothing will disturb. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. The only place where that hungry, passion-ridden heart of yours, conscious of alienation from God, can find rest, is close by Jesus Christ. The Lord be with us all, and then the peace of that Lord shall clothe and fill our hearts in Christ Jesus.