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

**JOHN-075**. **CHRIST'S PEACE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"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*

Peace be unto you!was, and is, the common Eastern salutation, both in meeting and in parting. It carries us back to a state of society in which every stranger might be an enemy. It is a confession of the deep unrest of the human heart. Christ was about closing His discourse, and the common word of leave-taking came naturally to His lips; just as when He first met His followers after the Resurrection, He soothed their fears by the calm and familiar greeting, Peace be unto you!But common words deepen their force and meaning when He uses them. In Him all things become new, and on His lips the conventional threadbare salutation changes into a tender and mysterious communication of a real gift. His words are deeds, and His wishes for His disciples fulfil themselves.

**I. So we have here, first, the greeting, which is a gift.**

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. We have seen, in former discourses on this chapter, how prominently and repeatedly our Lord insists on the great truth of His dwelling with and in His disciples. He gives His peace because He gives Himself; and in the bestowal of His life He bestows, in so far as we possess the gift, the qualities and attributes of that life. His peace is inseparable from His presence. It comes with Him, like an atmosphere; it is never where He is not. It was His peace inasmuch as, in His own experience, He possessed it. His manhood was untroubled by perturbation or tumult, by passions or contending desires, and no outward things could break His calm. If we open our hearts by lowly faith, love, and aspiration for His entrance, we too may be at rest; for His peace, like all which He is and has, is His that it may be ours.

The first requisite for peace is consciousness of harmonious and loving relations between me and God. The deepest secret of Christ's peace was His unbroken consciousness of unbroken communion with the Father, in which His will submitted and the whole being of the man hung in filial dependence upon God. And the centre and foundation of all the peace-giving power of Jesus Christ is this, that in His death, by His one offering for sin for ever, He has swept away the occasion of antagonism, and so made peace between the twain, the Father in the heavens and the child, rebellious and prodigal, here below. Little as these disciples dreamed of it, the death impending, which was already beginning to cast its shadow over their souls, was the condition of securing to them and to us the true beginning of all real peace, the rectifying of our antagonistic relation to God, and the bringing Him and us into perfect concord.

My brother, no man can be at rest down to the very roots of His being, in the absence of the consciousness that he is at peace with God. There may be tumults of gladness, there may be much of stormy brightness in the life, but there cannot be the calm, still, impregnable, all-pervading, and central tranquillity that our souls hunger for, unless we know and feel that we are right with God, and that there is nothing between us and Him. And it is because Jesus Christ, dying on the Cross, has made it possible for you and me to feel this, that He Is our peace, and that He can say, Peace I leave with you.

Another requisite is that we must be at peace with ourselves. There must be no stinging conscience, there must be no unsatisfied desires, there must be no inner schism between inclination and duty, reason and will, passion and judgment. There must be the quiet of a harmonised nature which has one object, one aim, one love; which--to use a very vulgar phrase--has all its eggs in one basket, and has no contradictions running through its inmost self. There is only one way to get that peace--cleaving to Jesus Christ and making Him our Lord, our righteousness, our aim, our all. Your consciences will sting, and that destroys peace; or if they do not sting, they will be torpid, and that destroys peace, for death is not peace. Unless we take Christ for our love, for the light of our minds, for the Sovereign Arbiter and Lord of our will, for the home of our desires, for the aim of our efforts, we shall never know what it is to be at rest. Unsatisfied and hungry we shall go through life, seeking what nothing short of an Infinite Humanity can ever give us, and that is a heart to lean our heads upon, an adequate object for all our faculties, and so a quiet satisfaction of all our desires. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread?A question that no man can answer without convicting himself of folly! There is One, and only One, who is enough for me, poor and weak and lowly and fleeting as I am, and as my earthly life is. Take that One for your Treasure, and you are rich indeed. The world without Christ is nought. Christ without the world is enough.

Nor is there any other way of healing the inner discord, schism, and contradiction of our anarchic nature, except in bringing it all into submission to His merciful rule. Look at that troubled kingdom that each of us carries about within himself, passion dragging this way, conscience that, a hundred desires all arrayed against one another, inclination here, duty there, till we are torn in pieces like a man drawn asunder by wild horses. And what is to be done with all that rebellious self, over which the poor soul rules as it may, and rules so poorly? Oh! there is an inner unrest, the necessary fate of every man who does not take Christ for his King. But when He enters the heart with His silken leash, the old fable comes true, and He binds the lions and the ravenous beasts there with its slender tie and leads them along, tamed, by the cord of love, and all harnessed to pull together in the chariot that He guides. There is only one way for a man to be at peace with himself through and through, and that is that he should put the guidance of his life into the hands of Jesus Christ, and let Him do with it as He will. There is one power, and only one, that can draw after it all the multitudinous heaped waters of the weltering ocean, and that is the quiet, silver moon in the heavens that pulls the tidal wave, into which melt and merge all currents and small breakers, and rolls it round the whole earth. And so Christ, shining down lambent, and gentle, but changeless, from the darkest of our skies, will draw, in one great surge of harmonised motion, all the else contradictory currents of our stormy souls. My peace I give unto you.

Another element in true tranquillity, which again is supplied only by Jesus Christ, is peace with men. Whence come wars and fightings amongst you? From your lusts. Or to translate the old-fashioned phraseology into modern English, the reason why men are in antagonism with one another is the central selfishness of each, and there is only one way by which men's relations can be thoroughly sweetened, and that is, by the divine love of Jesus Christ pouring into their hearts, and casting out the devil of selfishness, and so blending them all into one harmonious whole.

The one basis of true, happy relations between man and man, without which there is not the all-round tranquillity that we require, lies in the common relation of all, if it may be, but certainly in the individual relation of myself, to Him who is the Lover and the Friend of all. And in the measure in which the law of the Spirit of life which was in Jesus Christ is in me, in that measure do I find it possible to reproduce His gentleness, sympathy, compassion, insight into men's sorrows, patience with men's offences, and all which makes, in our relations to one another, the harmony and the happiness of humanity.

Another of the elements or aspects of peace is peace with the outer world. It is hard to kick against the pricks, but if you do not kick against them, they will not prick you. We beat ourselves all bruised and bleeding against the bars of the prison-house in trying to escape from it, but if we do not beat ourselves against them, they will not hurt us. If we do not want to get out of prison, it does not matter though we are locked in. And so it is not external calamities, but the resistance of the will to these, that makes the disturbances of life. Submission is peace, and when a man with Christ in his heart can say what Christ said, Not My will, but Thine be done, Oh! then, some faint beginnings, at least, of tranquillity come to the most agitated and buffeted; and even in the depths of our sorrow we may have a deeper depth of calm. If we have yielded ourselves to the Father's will, through that dear Son who has set the example and communicates the power of filial obedience, then all winds blow us to our haven, and all things work together for good, and nothing that is at enmity with joycan shake our settled peace. Storms may break upon the rocky shore of our islanded lives, but deep in the centre there will be a secluded, inland dell which heareth not the loud winds when they call, and where no tempest can ever reach. Peace may be ours in the midst of warfare and of storms, for Christ with us reconciles us to God, harmonises us with ourselves, brings us into amity with men, and makes the world all good.

**II. So, secondly, note here the world's gift, which is an illusion.**

Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Our Lord contrasts, as it seems to me, primarily the manner of the world's bestowment, and then passes insensibly into a contrast between the character of the world's gifts and His own. That phrase the worldmay have a double sense. It may mean either mankind in general or the whole external and material frame of things. I think we may use both significations in elucidating the words before us.

Regarding it in the former of them, the thought is suggested--Christ gives; men can only wish. Peace be unto youcomes from many a lip, and is addressed to many an ear, unfulfilled. Christ says peace, and His word is a conveyance. How little we can do for one another's tranquillity, how soon we come to the limits of human love and human help! How awful and impassable is the isolation in which each human soul lives! After all love and fellowship we dwell alone on our little island in the deep, separated by the salt, unplumbed, estranging sea, and we can do little more than hoist signals of goodwill, and now and then for a moment stretch our hands across the echoing straits between. But it is little after all that husband or wife can do for one another's central peace, little that the dearest friend can give. We have to depend upon ourselves and upon Christ for peace. That which the world wishes Christ gives.

And then, if we take the other signification of the world, and the other application of the whole promise, we may say--Outward things can give a man no real peace. The world is for excitement; Christ alone has the secret of tranquillity. It is as if to a man in a fever a physician should come and say: I cannot give you anything to soothe you; here is a glass of brandy for you. That would not help the fever, would it? The world comes to us and says: I cannot give you rest: here is a sharp excitement for you, more highly spiced and titillating for your tongue than the last one, which has turned flat and stale. That is about the best that it can do.

Oh! what a confession of unrest are the rush and recklessness, the fever and the fret of our modern life with its ever renewed and ever disappointed quest after good! You go about our streets and look men in the face, and you see how all manner of hungry desires and eager wishes have imprinted themselves there. And now and then--how seldom!--you come across a face out of which beams a deep and settled peace. How many of you are there who dare not be quiet because then you are most troubled? How many of you are there who dare not reflect because then you are wretched? How many of you are uncomfortable when alone, either because you are utterly vacuous, or because then you are surrounded by the ghosts of ugly thoughts that murder sleep and stuff every pillow with thorns? The world will bring you excitement; Christ, and Christ alone will bring you rest.

The peace that earth gives is a poor affair at best. It is shallow; a very thin plating over a depth of restlessness, like some skin of turf on a volcano, where a foot below the surface sulphurous fumes roll, and hellish turbulence seethes. That is the kind of rest that the world brings.

Oh! dear friends, there is nothing in this world that will fill and satisfy your hearts except only Jesus Christ. The world is for excitement; and Christ is the only real Giver of real peace.

**III. Lastly, note the duty of the recipients of that peace of Christ's: Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.**

The words that introduced this great discourse return again at its close, somewhat enlarged and with a deepened soothing and tenderness. There are two things referred to as the source of restlessness, troubled agitation or disturbance of heart; and that mainly, I suppose, because of terror in the outlook towards a dim and unknown future. The disciples are warned to fight against these if they would keep the gift of peace.

That is to say, casting the exhortation into a more general expression, Christ's gift of peace does not dispense with the necessity for our own effort after tranquillity. There is much in the outer world that will disturb us to the very end, and there is much within ourselves that will surge up and seek to shake our repose and break our peace; and we have to coerce and keep down the temptations to anxiety, the temptations to undue agitation of desire, the temptations to tumults of sorrow, the temptations to cowardly fears of the unknown future. All these will continue, even though we have Christ's peace in our hearts, and it is for us to see to it that we treasure the peace, and in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let our requests be made known unto God, that nothing may break the calm which we possess.

So, then, another thought arises from this final exhortation, and that is, that it is useless to tell a man, Do not be troubled, and do not be afraid, unless he first has Christ's peace as his. Is that peace yours, my brother, because Jesus Christ is yours? If so, then there is no reason for your being troubled or dreading any future. If it is not, you are mad not to be troubled, and you are insane if you are not afraid. The word for you is, Be troubled, ye careless ones, for there is reason for it, and be afraid of that which is certainly coming. The one thing that gives security and makes it possible to possess a calm heart is the possession of Jesus Christ by faith. Without Him it is a waste of breath to say to people, Do not be frightened, and it is wicked counsel to say to men, Be at ease. They ought to be terrified, and they ought to be troubled, and they will be some day, whether they think so or not.

But then the last thought from this exhortation is--and now I speak to Christian people--your imperfect possession of this peace is all your own fault. Why, there are hundreds of professing Christian people who have some kind of faint, rudimentary faith, and there are many of them, I dare say, listening to me now, who have no assured possession of any of those elements, of which I have been speaking, as the constituent parts of Christ's peace. You are not sure that you are right with God. You do not know what it is to possess satisfied desires. You do know what it is to have conflicting inclinations and impulses; you have envy and malice and hostility against men; and the world's storms and disasters do strike and disturb you. Why? Because you have not a firm grasp of Jesus Christ. I have set the Lord always at my right hand, therefore I shall not be be moved; there is the secret. Keep near Him, my brother; and then all things are fair, and your heart is at peace.

I remember once standing by the side of a little Highland loch on a calm autumn day, when all the winds were still, and every birch-tree stood unmoved, and every twig was reflected on the steadfast mirror, into the depths of which Heaven's own blue seemed to have found its way. That is what our hearts may be, if we let Christ put His guarding hand round them to keep the storms off, and have Him within us for our rest. But the man who does not trust Jesus is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, but goes moaning round half the world, homeless and hungry, rolling and heaving, monotonous and yet changeful, salt and barren--the true emblem of every soul that has not listened to the merciful call, Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.