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

**PHILIPPIANS-027**. **THE WARRIOR PEACE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

*Philippians 4:7*

The great Mosque of Constantinople was once a Christian church, dedicated to the Holy Wisdom. Over its western portal may still be read, graven on a brazen plate, the words, Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. For four hundred years noisy crowds have fought, and sorrowed, and fretted, beneath the dim inscription in an unknown tongue; and no eye has looked at it, nor any heart responded. It is but too sad a symbol of the reception which Christ's offers meet amongst men, and--blessed be His name!--its prominence there, though unread and unbelieved, is a symbol of the patient forbearance with which rejected blessings are once and again pressed upon us, and He stretches out His hand though no man regards, and calls though none do hear. My text is Christ's offer of peace. The world offers excitement, Christ promises repose.

**I. Mark, then, first, this peace of God.**

What is it? What are its elements? Whence does it come? It is of God, as being its Source, or Origin, or Author, or Giver, but it belongs to Him in a yet deeper sense, for Himself is Peace. And in some humble but yet real fashion our restless and anxious hearts may partake in the divine tranquillity, and with a calm repose, kindred with that rest from which it is derived, may enter into His rest.

If that be too high a flight, at all events the peace that may be ours was Christ's, in the perfect and unbroken tranquillity of His perfect Manhood. What, then, are its elements? The peace of God must, first of all, be peace with God. Conscious friendship with Him is indispensable to all true tranquillity. Where that is absent there may be the ignoring of the disturbed relationship; but there will be no peace of heart. The indispensable requisite is a conscience like a sea at rest. Unless we have made sure work of our relationship with God, and know that He and we are friends, there is no real repose possible for us. In the whirl of excitement we may forget, and for a time turn away from, the realities of our relation to Him, and so get such gladness as is possible to a life not rooted in conscious friendship with Him. But such lives will be like some of those sunny islands in the Eastern Pacific, extinct volcanoes, where nature smiles and all things are prodigal and life is easy and luxuriant; but some day the clouds gather, and the earth shakes, and fire pours forth, and the sea boils, and every living thing dies, and darkness and desolation come. You are living, brother, upon a volcano's side, unless the roots of your being are fixed in a God who is your friend.

Again, the peace of God is peace within ourselves. The unrest of human life comes largely from our being torn asunder by contending impulses. Conscience pulls this way, passion that. Desire says, Do this; reason, judgment, prudence say, It is at your peril if you do! One desire fights against another, and so the man is rent asunder. There must be the harmonising of all the Being if there is to be real rest of spirit. No longer must it be like the chaos ere the creative word was spoken, where, in gloom, contending elements strove.

Again, men have not peace, because in most of them everything is topmost that ought to be undermost, and everything undermost that ought to be uppermost. Beggars are on horseback (and we know where they ride), and princes walking. The more regal part of the man's nature is suppressed, and trodden under foot; and the servile parts, which ought to be under firm restraint, and guided by a wise hand, are too often supreme, and wild work comes of that. When you put the captain and the officers, and everybody on board that knows anything about navigation, into irons, and fasten down the hatches on them, and let the crew and the cabin boys take the helm and direct the ship, it is not likely that the voyage will end anywhere but on the rocks. Multitudes are living lives of unrestfulness, simply because they have set the lowest parts of their nature upon the throne, and subordinated the highest to these.

Our unrest comes from yet another source. We have not peace, because we have not found and grasped the true objects for any of our faculties. God is the only possession that brings quiet. The heart hungers until it feeds upon Him. The mind is satisfied with no truth until behind truth it finds a Person who is true. The will is enslaved and wretched until in God it recognises legitimate and absolute authority, which it is blessing to obey. Love puts out its yearnings, like the filaments that gossamer spiders send out into the air, seeking in vain for something to fasten upon, until it touches God, and clings there. There is no rest for a man until he rests in God. The reason why this world is so full of excitement is because it is so empty of peace, and the reason why it is so empty of peace is because it is so void of God. The peace of God brings peace with Him, and peace within. It unites our hearts to fear His name, and draws all the else turbulent and confusedly flowing impulses of the great deep of the spirit after itself, in a tidal wave, as the moon draws the waters of the gathered ocean. The peace of God is peace with Him, and peace within.

I need not, I suppose, do more than say one word about that descriptive clause in my text, It passeth understanding. The understanding is not the faculty by which men lay hold of the peace of God any more than you can see a picture with your ears or hear music with your eyes. To everything its own organ; you cannot weigh truth in a tradesman's scales or measure thought with a yard-stick. Love is not the instrument for apprehending Euclid, nor the brain the instrument for grasping these divine and spiritual gifts. The peace of God transcends the understanding, as well as belongs to another order of things than that about which the understanding is concerned. You must experience it to know it; you must have it in order that you may feel its sweetness. It eludes the grasp of the wisest, though it yields itself to the patient and loving heart.

**II. So notice, in the next place, what the peace of God does.**

It shall keep your hearts and minds. The Apostle here blends together, in a very remarkable manner, the conceptions of peace and of war, for he employs a purely military word to express the office of this Divine peace. That word, shall keep, is the same as is translated in another of his letters kept with a garrison--and, though, perhaps, it might be going too far to insist that the military idea is prominent in his mind, it will certainly not be unsafe to recognise its presence.

So, then, this Divine peace takes upon itself warlike functions, and garrisons the heart and mind. What does he mean by the heart and mind? Not, as the English reader might suppose, two different faculties, the emotional and the intellectual--which is what we usually roughly mean by our distinction between heart and mind--but, as is always the case in the Bible, the heart means the whole inner man, whether considered as thinking, willing, purposing, or doing any other inward act; and the word rendered mind does not mean another part of human nature, but the whole products of the operations of the heart. The Revised Version renders it by thoughts, and that is correct if it be given a wide enough application, so as to include emotions, affections, purposes, as well as thoughts in the narrower sense. The whole inner man, in all the extent of its manifold operations, that indwelling peace of God will garrison and guard.

So note, however profound and real that Divine peace is, it is to be enjoyed in the midst of warfare. Quiet is not quiescence. God's peace is not torpor. The man that has it has still to wage continual conflict, and day by day to brace himself anew for the fight. The highest energy of action is the result of the deepest calm of heart; just as the motion of this solid, and, as we feel it to be, immovable world, is far more rapid through the abysses of space, and on its own axis, than any of the motions of the things on its surface. So the quiet heart, which moveth altogether if it move at all, rests whilst it moves, and moves the more swiftly because of its unbroken repose. That peace of God, which is peace militant, is unbroken amidst all conflicts. The wise old Greeks chose for the protectress of Athens the goddess of Wisdom, and whilst they consecrated to her the olive branch, which is the symbol of peace, they set her image on the Parthenon, helmed and spear-bearing, to defend the peace, which she brought to earth. So this heavenly Virgin, whom the Apostle personifies here, is the winged sentry, all skilful in the wars, who enters into our hearts and fights for us to keep us in unbroken peace.

It is possible day by day to go out to toil and care and anxiety and change and suffering and conflict, and yet to bear within our hearts the unalterable rest of God. Deep in the bosom of the ocean, beneath the region where winds howl and billows break, there is calm, but the calm is not stagnation. Each drop from these fathomless abysses may be raised to the surface by the power of the sunbeams, expanded there by their heat, and sent on some beneficent message across the world. So, deep in our hearts, beneath the storm, beneath the raving winds and the curling waves, there may be a central repose, as unlike stagnation as it is unlike tumult; and the peace of God may, as a warrior, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

What is the plain English of that metaphor? Just this, that a man who has that peace as his conscious possession is lifted above the temptations that otherwise would drag him away. The full cup, filled with precious wine, has no room in it for the poison that otherwise might be poured in. As Jesus Christ has taught us, there is such a thing as cleansing a heart in some measure, and yet because it is empty, though it is swept and garnished, the demons come back again. The best way to be made strong to resist temptation, is to be lifted above feeling it to be a temptation, by reason of the sweetness of the peace possessed. Oh! if our hearts were filled, as they might be filled, with that divine repose, do you think that the vulgar, coarse-tasting baits which make our mouths water now would have any power over us? Will a man who bears in his hands jewels of priceless value, and knows them to be such, find much temptation when some imitation stone, made of coloured glass and a tinfoil backing, is presented to him? Will the world draw us away if we are rooted and grounded in the peace of God? Geologists tell us that climates are changed and creatures are killed by the slow variation of level in the earth. If you and I can only heave our lives up high enough, the foul things that live down below will find the air too pure and keen for them, and will die and disappear; and all the vermin that stung and nestled down in the flats will be gone when we get up to the heights. The peace of God will keep our hearts and thoughts.

**III. Now, lastly, notice how we get the peace of God.**

My text is an exuberant promise, but it is knit on to something before, by that and at the beginning of the verse. It is a promise, as all God's promises are, on conditions. And here are the conditions. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. That defines the conditions in part; and the last words of the text itself complete the definition. In Christ Jesus describes, not so much where we are to be kept, as a condition under which we shall be kept. How, then, can I get this peace into my turbulent, changeful life?

I answer, first, trust is peace. It is always so; even when it is misplaced we are at rest. The condition of repose for the human heart is that we shall be in Christ, who has said, In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace. And how may I be in Him? Simply by trusting myself to Him. That brings peace with God.

The sinless Son of God has died on the Cross, a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, for yours and for mine. Let us trust to that, and we shall have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And in Him we have, by trust, inward peace, for He, through our faith, controls our whole natures, and Faith leads the lion in a silken leash, like Spenser's Una. Trust in Christ brings peace amid outward sorrows and conflicts. When the pilot comes on board the captain does not leave the bridge, but stands by the pilot's side. His responsibility is past, but his duties are not over. And when Christ comes into my heart, my effort, my judgment, are not made unnecessary, or put on one side. Let Him take the command, and stand beside Him, and carry out His orders, and you will find rest to your souls.

Again, submission is peace. What makes our troubles is not outward circumstances, howsoever afflictive they may be, but the resistance of our spirits to the circumstances. And where a man's will bends and says, Not mine but Thine be done, there is calm. Submission is like the lotion that is applied to mosquito bites--it takes away the irritation, though the puncture be left. Submission is peace, both as resignation and as obedience.

Communion is peace. You will get no quiet until you live with God. Until He is at your side you will always be moved.

So, dear friend, fix this in your minds: a life without Christ is a life without peace. Without Him you may have excitement, pleasure, gratified passions, success, accomplished hopes, but peace never! You never have had it, have you? If you live without Him, you may forget that you have not Him, and you can plunge into the world, and so lose the consciousness of the aching void, but it is there all the same. You never will have peace until you go to Him. There is only one way to get it. The Christless heart is like the troubled sea that cannot rest. There is no peace for it. But in Him you can get it for the asking. The chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him. For our sakes He died on the Cross, so making peace. Trust Him as your only hope, Saviour and friend, and the God of peace will fill you with all joy and peace in believing. Then bow your wills to Him in acceptance of His providence, and in obedience to His commands, and so, your peace shall be as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea. Then keep your hearts in union and communion with Him, and so His presence will keep you in perfect peace whilst conflicts last, and, with Him at your side, you will pass through the valley of the shadow of death undisturbed, and come to the true Salem, the city of peace, where they beat their swords into ploughshares, and learn and fear war no more.