**THINGS THAT MATTER MOST - DEVOTIONAL PAPERS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**08. THE BEQUEST OF PEACE by JOHN H. JOWETT**

"MY peace I give unto you." These words gain immensely deepened significance from the circumstances in which they were spoken. When we put them into their surroundings they shine like a radiant gem with a foil of dark background. When the Lord spake these words He was not resting in the domestic love and quietness of the home at Bethany. The air was thick with rumours, and the betrayer had gone out, and was even now engaged in his treacherous mission. Even Peter's loyalty threatened to surrender to evil popular will. Crucifixion was not twenty-four hours away. Christ's enemies were at the very gate. It was in circumstances like these, turbulent and stormy, that our Lord quietly claimed to be in possession of deep and mysterious peace.

"Peace I leave with you." The form of the speech is that of a customary salutation or farewell. "Whatsoever house ye enter let your peace be upon it." But our Lord's speech is widely different from the common convention. People had fallen into the habit of saying "Peace" as we have got into the habit of saying "Good-morning" or "Goodbye," and there was as little vital content in one as in the other. The salutation had lost its sanctity. It had become a formality of life. The customary speech was used just to break an awkward silence; the Lord's was used to renew and enrich the heart. The conventional speech was idly ceremonial; the Lord's was a gracious achievement. At the best, the popular speech was an expression of affability; the Lord's benediction was an invaluable bequest. When He said "Peace," there was something accomplished, something done. It was not an affair of empty words; it was a glorious transaction. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, they are life." The salutation was, therefore, vital and effective; it was a holy minister, conveying inconceivable treasures to the hearts of men.

"My peace I give unto you." What is the nature of this peace? First of all it is rightness with God. When the Lord Jesus Christ brings His own peace into the hearts of men, they become inherently sound by becoming fundamentally at one with God. It is very significant that the radical meaning of the original word is suggestive of union; two sundered things are brought together again. And the gift of peace means a recovery of healthy fellowship between the soul .and the eternal God. Now let it be understood at once that the gift of peace does not imply perfection. There may be a general "rightness" in the relationship between man and wife, and yet there may be an occasional misunderstanding, even a temporary outburst of temper, while nothing fundamental becomes crooked or perverse. A general "rightness" or healthiness of the body is consistent with an occasional chill or superficial scratch or pain. There may be a temporary derangement while the heart is as sound as a bell. Our Lord acknowledged this possibility in His own gracious teachings. Men may be essentially right with God who are not yet by any means perfect. Even a man who has been bathed "needeth to wash his feet." And so peace consists essentially in this innermost "rightness" with God. The general life tends toward the highest. Its primary ambitions are fixed upon the good pleasure of God. There is intimacy of fellowship. There is an open road. There is a ladder of communion, on which the angels ascend and descend continually. The peace that the Lord gives enables the soul to say with glad humility, "I and my Father are one."

And secondly, if peace is fundamental rightness with God, it is also fundamental union with God's universe. Natural forces become the friendly allies of men who are right with God. "The whole creation groaneth and waiteth for the manifestation of the children of God." When a man is one with the Maker he has the co-operation of all the Maker has made. The winds and currents are his friends. "The stars in their courses" fight on his side. There is established "a covenant between him and the stones of the field." And so peace is the condition of the soul in its God-purposed relationship of being right with Him and one with the movements of the Divine order in the world.

Now, our Lord had this peace. It was His through all His changing days. It was independent of seasons, and He had it "in the dark and cloudy day." And, therefore, there are certain things we can say about it. This peace can exist in the midst of apparent defeat. It does not require success to assure one of its presence. We can have God's peace and yet be apparent failures in the world. For look at our Saviour Himself. Look at His position when the words were uttered. The antagonism of the multitude was approaching culmination. Despite His wealth of gracious deeds He was everywhere met with deep and fierce resentment. Even His own disciples pathetically misunderstood His mission. After a training of three years, when He had daily led them into the realm of the Spirit and into communion with the Highest, they had just been quarrelling one with another, "Who should be greatest." One of the disciples was the victim of greed, and he deliberately sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. The rest of the disciples were becoming fearful, and the mood of desertion was upon them. Crucifixion was at hand. What an apparent failure! From the worldly point of view everything had gone wrong. And yet, in spite of everything, the Lord retained His condition of peace. And so it may be with the Lord's disciples. The applause of men may not gratify our ears. No worldly garland may be put upon our brow. We may climb unto no high place in the world's esteem. We may stumble along a painful way, we may be continually jostled and elbowed into the rear of the competing crowd, and yet we may have fundamental "rightness" with God and share with Jesus the condition of heavenly peace.

If Jesus Christ had this peace, then its possession does not make us incapable of sorrow. No; it would be more true to say that this peace makes us more capable of sorrow, for to be right with God is to be sensitive to His joys and sorrows, and to share them. The Master who spake about "My peace" wept over Jerusalem, and His heart was torn by the contemplation of the sins of the city. He wept by the grave of Lazarus as He called to mind the accumulated common sorrows of the world. He wept over the vagrant, aimless multitude, for what is "compassion" but a most refined and delicate form of grief? He saw that the crowd was wayward and vagrant, purposeless, moving here and there in constant danger, and He pitied the crowd with a pity that redeemed it. Thus the Lord had an infinite capacity for sorrow, and yet He was in possession of peace. It is even so with His disciples. The Apostle Paul used words which are seemingly inconsistent with one another, "What sorrow I have!" "What travail!" "How I agonize!" And yet he could also speak of "The peace of God which passeth understanding." He was fundamentally right with God, but the fountain of tears was not dried up.

Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round?

On Jesus' bosom naught but peace is found.

And then, in the third place, it is evident that the possession of peace does not banish the possibility of temptation. Our Master, who claimed the possession of peace, was tempted on every side. He had the temptations that besiege the flesh and seek the unlawful gratification of appetite. He had the temptations which assail the mind and seek to entice it to mental presumption. He had the temptations which waylay the soul and seek to seduce it into illicit homage. And these temptations were repeated throughout His life. He was essentially at one with the Father, and yet temptations were never away from His door. It is well for us to remember this. We are sometimes inclined to suspect the reality of our union with God by the number and prevalence of our snares. We are apt to regard our temptations as signs of our detachment from the Master. We may be at peace when temptations crowd the field. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." God's saints have in all generations sat at that table, and their souls have been filled with holy laughter in the confidence of their God.

Now this wonderful peace is the gift of the Lord Jesus. "I give unto you." All that is requisite for us to possess the gift is in the power of the Lord Jesus. In Him we have the forgiveness of sin. In Him we obtain the mystic union with our God. In Him we find the secret strength of holy continuance. All are "His and His alone." This peace is not the perquisite of some particular temperament. It is not the attainment of painful effort and service. It is not the refined fruit of prolonged culture. It is a legacy. "Peace I leave with you." It is a gift; "My peace I give unto you." "He is our peace."

And there are two ways in which this gift of peace differs from the gifts of the world. In the first place, it differs in the matter of the gift. When the world seeks to give peace it addresses itself to conditions; the Lord addresses Himself to character. The world deals with things; the Lord deals with kinships. The world keeps in the material realm; Jesus Christ moves in the spiritual realm. The world offers to put us into a fine house; the Lord offers to make a fine tenant. The world will introduce us into "fine society"; Jesus will make us at home with God.

In the second place, our Lord differs from the world in the manner of His giving. The world always gives its best at the beginning. It offers gaudy garlands, brimming cups, and glittering crowns. "But knowest thou not it shall be bitterness in the latter end?" It makes an imposing fire, but we are speedily left with the ashes. It leads us to a showy feast, but we soon encounter aches and pains. It blinds us with the "garish day"; then come chill twilight and uncompanionable night. "Not as the world giveth give I." He keeps His good wine until last. He leads us from grace to grace, from faith to faith, from glory to glory. "Greater things than these shall we see." His gifts grow deeper, richer, fuller, right through the eternal years.