

Sermon notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (6-9-1981 Strandtown Baptist Church)

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Introduction

This is the last great statement in 2 Thessalonians. **The Lord of peace himself, give you peace always, by all means.**

Peace is a great Bible word. It was the customary greeting among Jews (equivalent to an English “How do you do?” or the Greek “Rejoice”). Hence, “Shalom” found its way into the Christian message.

Peace is the deepest need of humanity, the deepest longing of every human soul. Unrest tortures every human heart, and people seek to escape it by shirking their duties, selfish pursuits, mere pleasure, or intellectual effort. In our hearts is a cry for rest and peace. Rest of the Spirit is the source of true blessedness.

Paul takes this very Jewish word, a word which speaks of our deepest needs, and baptizes it into Christ, and so it becomes a new creation, with new depth and dimension. He speaks of the deepest kind of peace we can have. It is a reality, not a will o’ the wisp thing. When we have this kind of peace, growth is encouraged, we gain stability, confidence, freedom to help others, and “a heart at leisure from itself to soothe and sympathize”.

This peace is a gift from One who may be described, among many titles, as the Lord of peace.

The nature of peace

We are going to analyse this peace more closely. What does this greatest need of ours mean? It is so easy to use words and jargon without going beneath the surface.

- (a) The peace of a quiet conscience. We have condemnation of sin removed by forgiveness and justification, because the Cross and Christ’s perfect righteousness imputed to us means we are justified. **Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ** (Romans 5:1). We are not merely pardoned criminals, but perfectly righteous men in the eyes of divine law. Forgiven, and also reinstated.
- (b) The peace of a restful mind. Our minds are restful because our intellect can find satisfaction in the truth. Not that all intellectual problems and difficulties are solved, but we have sufficient knowledge of God and experience of His truth to bring satisfaction to our minds. This keeps growing till one day **I shall know fully, even as I am fully known** (1 Corinthians 13:12).
- (c) The peace of a surrendered will. In proportion as our will is surrendered to God, we know divine peace in our soul. Obedience and submission to God’s purposes brings peace. **You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you** (Isaiah 26:3).

- (d) The peace of a calm spirit. Nothing is more impressive or a greater testimony to the power of the Gospel than a calm spirit, especially when going through trials and tribulations. Not suggesting that peace exempts us from trouble, but it gives us peace in the midst of it. The surface may be turbulent and heaving to and fro, but beneath the waves there is deep peace within. **You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent** (Psalm 91:13). The lion, the cobra and the serpent represent three kinds of trouble. The lion can be seen or heard coming with a roar – troubles we know beforehand. The adder bites us before we know it – troubles we do not anticipate. The serpent (translated “dragon” in the AV), a creature of the imagination, in the mind of painter or poet – so many imaginary troubles. A man once said, “All my life I have been surrounded with troubles, and most of them have never come to me.” The peace of God helps us in real troubles, and in those we fear but never come.
- (e) The peace of a hopeful heart. We can have a heart that looks out on the future, and does so with hope. The Lord, His sovereignty, His purposes, His glorious return, keep us from utter depression in our days. We do not know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future.
- (f) The peace of hearty service. There is nothing like work for bringing satisfaction to the soul and keeping the soul in peace. It may be we have no real peace in our souls because we are doing nothing for Christ.
- (g) The peace of loving fellowship. Through Christ there are always ways of reconciliation and living at peace with fellows.

So the peace we are promised is peace of a quiet conscience, restful mind, surrendered will, calm spirit, hopeful heart, hearty service and loving fellowship.

Source of this peace

The text tells us the Lord of peace is the source. At His birth, the angels sang “peace on earth”. During His ministry He bid men “Go in peace”. At the end He said to His disciples “My peace I leave with you”. We have peace “through the blood of the Cross”. The fruits of His Spirit are “love, joy, peace...”. His Gospel is the “Gospel of peace”. Now in His glorified position He is the “Lord of peace”.

Note also how, when on earth, He was characterized by peace. He truly had tranquillity of spirit. We see it from afar and long to possess it. Consider all the calamities and changes of His life. He had peace even when He went through all kinds of emotions – for He too sorrowed, wept, wondered, was angry, loved – and endured more than the usual share of troubles - **a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering** (Isaiah 53:3). He had to carry out difficult duties and knew all about pain and struggle. Yet an unruffled calm marked His whole career. He had this because He was in perfect communion with His Father and was in complete submission to His will.

Because He is the Lord of peace, He is able to impart it to others. He is able to minister to our conscience, mind, will and spirit, circumstances and desires. He needs absolute control over our passions and the desires which torture us. There is only one hand able to tame the wild beasts of our nature. Only one who can ensure that calamities and adverse circumstances do not press on us with the heaviest

weight. Only one who is able to give patience and perseverance in the path of duty. Only one who can cause all things and circumstances to work together for good. Only one who, because of the Cross, is able to put our relations right with God, and establish friendship between us and Him.

Channel of peace

Give you peace always, by all means. Literally, in every way and at every turning of life. God has many ways of giving peace to the soul. Along every avenue of life and experience He can bring His peace. Not just at times of devotion, i.e. when we are in prayer, Bible reading, or in church, but also via joy and sorrow, pleasures and disappointments, losses and gains, blessings and bereavements, problems and their solutions. God's peace can come into our life through every avenue, whether dark or bright.

We need the widest views of God. He has thousands of ways of coming into our souls and bringing His own peace. Need to emphasize that we can know His peace even in days of trouble. Paul's words mean at every time. Peace over which calamities and sorrows need have no power. Peace of Christ is not exemption from warfare, but it is realized in the midst of warfare. No immunity from sorrow, but peace is felt in the midst of the storm of sorrow. There is not a calamity that can break our peace.

The trouble comes when our wills are resistant to God's will. When we submit and say, "Thy will be done", then nothing can break peace with God in our hearts. Amidst storms and calamities of life, there can be real peace while there is real communion and complete submission to the will of God. Peace comes through submission.

Duration of this peace

How long will it last? "Always" is the answer. The Greek word mean "continually" $\delta\iota\alpha\ \pi\alpha\nu\tau\omicron\varsigma$, moment by moment. God is giving it now, and will give it in the future. Need not worry about whether or not we will have peace tomorrow, or at the end of life.

A man once asked D.L.Moody, "Do you have dying grace?" Moody replied, "No, I don't want it. I want living grace. I shall not get dying grace till I come to die." We do not have to build bridges till we come to the water. Peace now can be renewed in all our tomorrows until the end.

Secret of peace

It is a divine gift, of supernatural origin. We do not have to work it up or merit it. It is in Christ, and ours through the Holy Spirit. Note how the verse ends – **The Lord be with you.** When we have Him, are right with Him, submissive to Him, we have His peace. It is not a commodity we can ask for on its own. If we want the gift, we must have the giver also, and on His terms.

It is His presence which makes the difference. If He is with me, the world's annoyances will be very small. If I hold His hand, I shall not be much troubled. If I nestle close to His side, I shall be shielded from the icy blast. If my heart is entwined around Him, I shall know the stability and calm which He knew. When He is in the vessel, the storm will not overwhelm.

If today we are conscious of breaches of restlessness, are overwhelmed by passions and outward circumstances, accused by conscience, we need to understand that the breaches of peace are not because of Him, but because we have let go of His hand, and our communion with Him is broken. Need to get back to where we were. Then receive, appropriate and take the gift He is able to renew to us.