

Peace Beyond Pressure

Tis time for prophets to talk of peace. It is easy for “doomsaying” to become a “trendy” thing. That is to say, a preacher may, in an effort to maintain relevance in his ministry, succumb to the temptation to join the popular wave of castigating the United States, and “baring her back,” to the “black-snake” of Divine wrath. In much of the ministry today, there seems to be a note of hopeless resignation to the irrevocable forces of decadence and destruction, and the inevitability of the universal wrath of God. Given the persistent preoccupation with this theme, one would assume that God dislikes His handiwork very much, and anxiously awaits the hour, when he may vent upon it, his holy fire of indignation. Unfortunately, it is not the godless, alone, who come under this floodtide of vehemence. The believers are often charged with being “accessories to the fact,” in their own spiritual inadequacies. “They should have been more faithful in praying; in giving; in going; in diligence and dedication.” So saint and sinner alike, seem to languish under the same pervasive pall of Divine displeasure. Under the perpetual shadow of guilt within, and the prospect of cosmic catastrophe without, the hope of peace seems, even for the believer, remote and unattainable.

What is needed in the midst of careless speculations and disheartening diatribes, is an anchor of certainty and a refreshing zephyr of encouragement. Today’s prophets should learn a lesson from the prophets of old. Isaiah, for example, whose entire ministry was devoted to warnings to Israel about her apostasy, gives to the faithful remnant—those who did not follow pagan deities—some of the most comforting and encouraging words in all of the Bible. In these promises, he spoke, not to the flawless, but to the faithful. *“Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed of thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust in the Lord forever; for in the Lord, Jehovah, is everlasting strength”* (Isaiah 26:3,4).

Again, *“Fear not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness”* (Isaiah 41:10).

Jesus, Himself, followed this pattern. Whereas He sounded many warnings, especially to the Pharisees, His ministry was filled with compassion and comfort and encouragement to the people of God. Certainly aware of the many weaknesses and failures of His own disciples, Jesus was constantly telling them to “be of good cheer.” *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of cheer; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). In the ardor for excellence, many pastors have so pressed the people for performance, that they have caused many to become discouraged and to feel themselves unworthy of Christ and unable to enter into a close personal enjoyment of Him.

Furthermore, the constant threat of catastrophe, hangs like a sword of Damocles, over the believer as well as the unbeliever. This, of course, robs the believer of any sense of security, in spite of the inadequate consolation that ultimately all things will work out for God’s purpose. The threat of present, imminent peril tends to overshadow the hopes for the future.

But how then can we really have peace? The answer lies in several substantial truths. First of all, we must realize that, essentially, peace is of the Spirit and not of the flesh. Jesus said, *“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). The peace He offered was not the transient peace of fleshly circumstance, but the abiding peace of the inner spirit. In Galatians 5:22, Paul tells us that peace is one of the fruits of the spirit. When Christ comes into our spirits, He brings His peace with Him. *“For He is our peace...”* (Ephesians 2:14). It is not that we who have been filled with the Spirit **ought** to have peace. It is rather that, possessing the Spirit of Christ within, we **do** have peace. But that peace must be understood as a peace in the spirit and not necessarily something felt in our emotions. The perfection of all the virtues of Christ are in the spirit of any who possess the Spirit of Christ. But, the capacity of the human mind or flesh to fully express those virtues is another thing. Thus, while our circumstance may bring us undeniable stress and we may have difficulty bringing our emotional responses under control: nevertheless, in the deep resources of our spirits there is a river of peace. The emotions are always deceptive. They are more the result of imagination than reality. Most of our fears and anxieties turn out to be groundless.

Unfortunately, these emotional vacillations produce guilt on top of the fears. One assumes that if one really trusts Christ, one ought to be at peace about the circumstances. The truth of the matter is that in spite of these surface feelings, one does trust Christ in the spirit. That is, a process of faith goes on continuously in our spirits because of the faith of Christ within, so that whether we feel confidence or not we are still held steady by the faith of Christ within. Whether or not that inner peace of the Spirit is also expressed in the mind will depend upon the degree of maturity and the growing process by which we learn to cope with life and to keep our priorities straight. The important thing to understand is that this struggle in the mind, to maintain an attitude of peace and confidence in Christ, is a natural and legitimate one and does not affect the steadfast process of faith in our spirits.

In the second place, it must be understood that Christ did not come to make a better world, nor were we saved for the purpose of curing all the ills of the flesh and giving us a prosperous life on the earth. We are on the earth, in fact, as Jesus, Himself, was on the earth. We are here to represent the Spirit of Christ in the world. Jesus paid little attention, either to His own wellbeing or to the general well-being of the people.

He healed a large number of people, but He did not correct the problem of physical weakness among the people of Israel. He fed a large number of people by the Sea of Galilee, but He did not correct the problem of poverty or hunger in Israel.

While peace in the spirit is based upon the presence there, of the “Prince of Peace,” peace of mind is directly related to one’s view of life and the world. It is matter of priorities. Expectation is the handmaiden of disappointment. The Bible indicates in a number of places, that the “Prince of *this* world,” exercises a considerable influence in it. In a certain sense, we are living in an “occupied territory.” When a city is occupied by the enemy, the only people who get along will are those who are willing to cooperate with the enemy. Satan will certainly

see to it that the people of God will not have an easy time of it in his world, if he can help it. Obviously, God is able to override Satan's purposes else Satan would crush the believers. He certainly tries to do so now, but is thwarted in his attempt by the "Hindering Spirit," that is, the Holy Spirit, who will continue to raise a bulwark against him, "*Until He (the Holy Spirit) shall be taken out of the way*" (See II Thessalonians 2). The Lord does provide for His people, in this world and sees to it that they have many earthly benefits. However, there are no guarantees as is obvious from the large number of God's people who have suffered deeply on the earth from the very beginning. It would be grossly unfair to assume that all of the Lord's people who have suffered on the earth did so because of some lack within them.

Thus we must conclude that the Lord exercises control over His people and allows adversity or prosperity as it suits His purpose for each individual. Perhaps, the more one is allowed to suffer, the more one may assume that God has trusted one to hold steadfastly in the midst of the suffering. Perhaps it is the weaker vessel that must always be handled with "kid gloves." Ultimately, our minds will be at peace, to the degree that we have learned to accept our lives as the Lord has elected to orchestrate them. The enemy, of course, wants us to believe that God has left us to the devices and whims of the enemy. So thought Job, in the midst of his earthly agony. Suffering is heightened exceedingly by the feeling that we have somehow failed and God has justly departed from us. But, He has said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

In the third place, are often robbed of peace in our minds by careless speculations from self-styled prophets. Many prophetic utterances which fill the mind with anxiety are based upon flimsy Biblical evidence and a large measure of traditional concepts, gleaned from centuries of speculative literature in the field of prophecy. A sample of the literature that proliferated during World War II will certainly show the fallacy of too much speculation. Making predictions about world events is, to say the least, extremely risky. Doomsayers have been with us for centuries—each one seeing his own particular era as the one fulfilling Biblical prophecy. For the most part, the predictors of prophecy, have been more revelationalists, than scholars. Much anxiety would be eliminated if Christians would be careful about their sources. In evaluating the validity of prophetic ministry, the following questions would be helpful.

- 1) *What are the credentials of the author?* Is he properly equipped for the exacting task of interpreting scripture? Many have labored under the false assumption that scholarship can be replaced by direct revelation. This is extremely risky since we have only the author's word as to the nature and validity of his own particular revelation.
- 2) *To what degree does the author use the writings of others in place of the scripture itself?* Many traditions have been perpetuated in the church that do not have a strong Biblical basis.
- 3) *How does the author handle the scripture?* Are passages taken out of context? Are statements belonging to one group or era misapplied to another? Is there a large amount of symbolism and speculation as to the meaning of a given text? All that we can ever be sure about are direct statements of scripture. Where one must engage in symbolism one must recognize the limitations and

Speak with restraint. For example, the name of the United States does not ever occur in the Scripture. There has been much speculation as to passages that appear to have relevance to the so called “new world.” but all we have are speculations. It is impossible to be certain about these interpretations. The wise teacher will recognize the need for qualifying his interpretations.

The foregoing questions will give one some degree of guidance. Ultimately, however, one must leave the entire matter in the Lord’s hands and be at peace. It is not possible to be certain about “times and seasons,” which Christ, Himself, was unwilling to discuss. In fact, He urged the Apostles not to get involved in such matters.

In the author’s own opinion (and it is an opinion), based upon considerable research into the scripture itself, the major issues of prophecy are relevant to the Middle East, and not to the Western world. The focal point of action in Ezekiel 38 is the city of Jerusalem—the beloved city, the unwalled city—which a careful reading of that chapter should make clear. The passage to identify this with is in Revelation 20, where the same specific names and events are mentioned. Equally obvious is the fact that these events take place in a post-millennial period, which puts it at least a thousand years away. Another major conflict is the moment at which Jesus returns to the Mount of Olives, to deliver Jerusalem from the hands of the anti-Christ. When He comes back, Jerusalem is intact and so we conclude that at least until Jesus returns to the Mount of Olives there will not be a destruction of civilization as by nuclear weaponry, which cataclysmic devastation is often predicted by the doomsayers today.

In conclusion, we repeat Isaiah’s promise—*“Thou will keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee.”* One of the most constantly recurring themes in the Bible is the injunction to focus our attention, not on the world or its inhabitants, but upon the Lord Jesus Christ—Lord of the universe and Sovereign over the kingdoms of this world.

David Morsey
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