

Christ's Legacy of Peace

by J. Glyn Owen

Jesus' promise to leave his peace with us is a gift that brings comfort and strength in times of turmoil and uncertainty.

Duration: 43:40

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6, Matthew 6:33, John 14:27, Romans 5:1, Philippians 4:7, Colossians 3:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:16

Topics: "Peace"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the concept of peace as mentioned in John 14:27. He highlights the elusive nature of peace in today's world, despite the various efforts made to achieve it. The preacher emphasizes that the peace that Jesus offers is different from what the world gives, and it is a legacy that he leaves with his disciples. He also mentions that peace is not given to the wicked, as they are in conflict with God. The sermon concludes by reminding the audience that Jesus is the ultimate peace-bringer and peacemaker.

Transcript

Will you kindly turn with me to the Word of God in St. John, chapter 14, and we are going to meditate a while on verse 27, where our Lord tells the twelve disciples, Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid. Christ's legacy of peace. To say that peace is one of the most elusive of all human quests, I guess, is to say the obvious.

Despite all social amenities, all our organizations were tackling the problem of dis-peace, whether in individual hearts, on the domestic or social, national or international fronts. Despite the kind of modern drugs that we have to bury our fears, and to sleep away through our troubles, we have come to a point in life where I believe we are realizing more than ever before that peace is one of the most elusive of all phenomena. I guess all that I have indicated now is a humbling commentary upon human nature on the one hand, and upon the real measure of human progress on the other.

Dis-peace reigns all over the world, as you and I meet in this peaceful house of God this morning. Dis-peace rules. Time was, of course, when men thought of peace all too largely in terms of simply the absence of hostility.

Peace includes that. I came across, some of you know, we are going to change our residence fairly soon, and I've been packing some books. I came across an old book written by a theological liberal who thought better of things and went on to write a book called On to Orthodoxy.

A very clever man, really, D. R. Davies. He was writing back in the thirties, and in the course of writing he said this. He was bewildered at things, and this is what he wrote.

There have been 286 wars in Europe during the last 300 years. But if you go further back, he says, since the year 1100 A.D., England has spent half her time in war. During 6,000 years of human history, there has not been one single day of universal peace.

Since the year 1500 B.C., over 8,000 peace treaties have been signed and sealed and documented, and they've remained in force for an average of approximately two years before being broken. It's amazing, it's amazing how elusive peace is. Now, Davies there seems to be thinking of peace, of course, almost exclusively in terms of the absence of evident hostilities of warfare.

All that he says, of course, bespeaks of unbelievable tragedy, but we have long learned that the absence of organized warfare between nations does not necessarily mean peace. We know of such a phenomenon as the Cold War, and it can be as unnerving and as horrifying as anything involved or involving hostilities. Some of us have lived through one or even two world wars, and I, for my part at any rate, having passed through one of them, would say that the terrors of the Cold War can be as devastating as the tragedies of the Hot War.

Not all will agree with that, but at any rate, a Cold War can be a very horrible experience. Despite all this, however, our text enshrines the words and promise of one who claims to be the donor of peace. It's a remarkable claim, really.

Did we not come to the New Testament via the Old? Had we not been introduced by the Holy Spirit in such places as Isaiah and I, to one who was going to come into the world, who would be indeed the prince of peace? This might take us by surprise. But God had promised that one would come into the world who would rule over peace, and who would dictate peace or its absence. So the same prophet Isaiah says, There is no peace, says my God to the wicked.

The peacebringer and the peacemaker and the peacegiver does not give his peace to the wicked. That is one reason why many people do not have peace today. They're fighting God.

They're at loggerheads with their Creator. They're moving in the wrong direction. They're doing the wrong things.

They're the wrong kind of people. They haven't been remade and reborn according to His image. But our Lord says, Peace I leave with you.

My very own peace I give you. And to make it quite sure that they've got the point, He says, I don't give you the kind of thing the world gives you. But I'm giving you something on the basis of which I command you, Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Cease being afraid. May I remind you, my friends? May I remind you to the glory of God? And eleven of those twelve disciples were never afraid. At least as far as the record goes.

And if the human history that we have, it may in measure be apocryphal, I don't know. But the tradition that we have speaks of the eleven of them, each in his own way, laying down his life deliberately for the cause of the gospel. They took their Lord at His word.

Let's look at this passage, let's look at this word, it's a very precious one. First of all, we must say a word about the challenging circumstances that surrounded the disciples when Jesus gave them this promise. Some of you may be facing challenging circumstances today.

Well, of course, someone or other is always moving the difficult way, the difficult road. But the wonderful thing is that our Lord Jesus Christ has provision for the difficult path. Here, the circumstances are familiar to most of you, but I ask you to bear with me nevertheless as we just face what we have here.

The glory of the Savior's promise, you see, can only be properly appreciated insofar as we share and bear in mind the peculiar circumstances in which they were uttered. First of all, He had recently announced to His disciples His own pending departure from them. To quote His own words, to be with the Father.

Their once bright sky had become ominously overcast and deeply clouded when their Master broke their peace one day and announced quite seriously that He was leaving them. For all their lives had been built around Him, that is, around His physical presence, not spiritually. It was He in person who called them to Him.

He in person had led them along. He in person had spoken to them, heard their own problems, disentangled many of them. He had been with them physically, close at hand.

And now it shook them to the very core when He says to them, I'm going away. Looking at the facts from the remote and more objective vantage point of history, we may well conclude that the dread and fear that gripped these men was not only unnecessary but even wrong. That's hindsight.

They were in it. And when He said to them, I'm going, to my Father, it was more than they could take. The fact is that the announcement of our Lord's imminent departure seems to have had such a disturbing effect upon the company that they scarcely heard anything else He went on to say.

And I find here an important principle quite apart from the truth itself. It always pays us, it always repays us to let our Lord finish what He's saying. Hear Him through.

Don't base what you believe on one little bit of information unless you've got the whole passage and the whole thread, may I say, the whole tapestry of the gospel as your back closet. See that Jesus has the opportunity to say all He wants to say and then understand the significant one statement in the light of the whole. You know what happened here? They were so thunderstruck by these words, I'm going away, that their ears became absolutely closed.

Do you wear earplugs, any of you, at any time? Well, okay, they put their earplugs in. They didn't hear anything else He said. And He Himself had put this in a context which made it even beneficial to them if they only accepted it.

He says, it is expedient for you that I go away. It's even for your profit, men, if you believe me, I'm going to make it profitable for you. But they didn't hear that.

Had not the Holy Spirit brought back those words to them again, they might well have been forgotten. They became so absorbed with what they deemed of as a pending tragedy of His departure they heard no more. And so we have this very dark and dismal picture at this point in the Gospels of the comforted remaining un comforted.

The comforted acting as comfortless. Largely because they did not hear what He said. He'd made the provision.

He'd made the promise. He'd repeated the promise. And He built so many things, as it were, building blocks of truth one above the other to make an edifice of truth that should sustain them in any exigency.

They didn't hear it. I'm going away. That's the one thing that they heard and they couldn't now hear anything else.

It was therefore a desperately dispirited group that Jesus was addressing in our text. I shall not add words to words this morning in order to bring that out. I trust it is obvious just from the little that we've said.

They were dispirited. They were sad. Their spirits were sagging.

And our text is a jewel set in the midst of a whole series of precious and comforting words that were aimed at bringing hope to them, making provision for them as He goes to be with the Father. God be praised that the Savior did not leave them to stew in their own fears. Unnecessary though those fears were, He didn't say, Oh my, you're always the same.

You don't hear what I'm saying to you. So just go on. Just stew in your own troubles.

He didn't do that. Isn't it wonderful that we have a Savior like that? I know of many times He could well and justifiably have said that to me. All right, if you're deaf to me, go on, you stupid fellow.

But He doesn't do that. And out of His infinite grace and compassion, He bears with them and He kind of adds words that are unnecessary to the sheer grammar of the occasion. People would charge our Lord with tautology here, with saying the same thing more than once, and it's unnecessary.

Just as a preacher is often charged. But however, He had His reason, and one reason was this. They hadn't heard anything.

And He wanted the word to get right through because He wanted them to be the comforted people of God. So we have this, this, this, this word about the glorious, the generous gift of peace. Peace I leave with you.

Oh, you silly people, why are you so distracted? The words that were meant to bring you peace have brought you the opposite. Look, look, He says, listen, listen. Open your minds and open your heart.

I want you to have peace. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.

I'm not giving you what the world gives, which is the very opposite. But I'm giving you something infinitely better. So don't let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Now let's analyze this a little. First of all, mark the simple statement concerning the gift He bequeathed them. Peace I leave with you.

My peace I give to you. It is left as someone would leave something in his or her will to a relative or a friend, and it is given as you would give something significantly valuable to a friend. And the two thoughts are brought together.

Peace. Possessors of the divine revelation in New Testament times, that is, the Jewish rabbis, had long recognized what Greece and Rome had not, that peace was a far bigger thing than the absence of hostility between people. The leading Jews had gone well beyond that, and their own great salutations and shalom meant infinitely more than that.

But I'm not going into that this morning. Even they, even they had no real understanding of what Jesus was saying. However versed they might have been in the Old Testament, however well they understood something of shalom, they fell short of the knowledge of what our Lord was really saying.

Peace I give you. My peace I give to you. In the New Testament, this positive content became gradually spelled out, so that peace was seen to include much more than anyone had ever conceived of.

I just want to throw two or three thoughts out together this morning, and I cannot dwell on them. In the first place, peace meant being in a reconciled condition with God, a reconciled relationship with God. Peace is the end of hostility.

And basically, basically, biblical peace is the end of hostilities with God. We're not fighting Him. There is a title to a book, Fighting God.

Have you ever read it? Fighting God. Well now, peace starts when you down arms, and you stop fighting, arguing back. You stop fighting.

You hand over your sword, and you let God be God in the sense in which God alone is God. And you take the place of a creature and of a sinner. God is God.

And you, through the blood of the cross, through the work of Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, you become reconciled to God. You know that word atonement. We speak of the death of our Lord Jesus as the atonement for our sins.

Just say it slowly, and you can see what it means. It means at-one-ment. That's what atonement means.

Our Lord died to make us at-one with God. And peace is being at-one with Him. We are united in our thinking, in our spirit.

We have turned around to be moving in His direction, living the kind of life He wants us to live, serving the kind of purpose He had for us, even when we were born and before that. And very significantly when we were reborn. But peace is more than that.

It starts there, being reconciled to God. Peace means now, fellowship with God. It's not just God and I moving in the same direction.

But we're talking together. Not as equals, because I'm still a creature. And I know of no one else who is any more than a creature.

And if you're walking with God, it's good for you as it is good for me to remember that we're creatures still. But we're walking with God. And He means us to be walking, not in the peace of silence, but in the peace

of getting on together.

He being the Lord, we being what He meant us to be. His children sharing in His thoughts, listening to His wisdom, going His way. This is peace.

But there is even more to it than that. Believing in God and communing with Him, this peace expresses itself in terms of hope as it looks into the future. And you see, this is where peace flourishes.

Walking with God, talking with God, communing with God. What has the future to frighten us? Because years ago when I heard an American preacher speak about the little girl going in the train across the country, coming to the Rockies, and little kid was sitting in the corner of the carriage and someone said, she was alone, aren't you afraid going through these dark tunnels? Oh no, she said, my daddy's at the engine. He was the driver apparently.

And of course she didn't mind going through the dark. What can there be on the way? What trouble can there be ahead? Her daddy was at the engine. Sweet simplicity.

But she expected all to be well. And there is a hymn we have in our Welsh Presbyterian hymn. We expect a bright tomorrow.

All will be well. Why? Because our Father is at the controls and our Savior is at the right hand of the Father and the Holy Spirit is given to us to bring us home according to the promises. All must be well or God is not God.

Jesus bequeathed such a gift to his disciples. He left it behind. This is his dowry.

This is his gift. This is what he made out of them in his will. Dear old Matthew Henry, oh there are some great modern commentators today.

Thank God for that. Quite a large number of excellently gifted men and women who write about Scripture, who expound the word. But some of the old ones are very good.

Dear old Matthew Henry is one of them. You know he has a way of saying things occasionally that really take your breath away. Listen to this.

When Christ left the world he made his will. His soul he bequeathed to his Father and his body to Joseph of Arimathea. His clothes fell to the soldiers.

His mother he left to the care of John. But what should he leave his poor disciples who had left all for him? Silver and gold he had none. But he left them what was far better, says Matthew Henry, his peace.

My peace I donate. I will to you my followers. Now then this gift that is bequeathed by Jesus is doubly qualified.

Positively and negatively. You notice how careful Jesus is here. He really wants to get it across.

Positively he qualified the initial statement with the pronoun my. My peace I give to you. It's not I'm just giving you peace.

But I'm giving you my peace. Now they all knew what he was talking about because they had seen that amazing peace of his exemplified throughout his life situations even in death. Sorry, not in death at this

time but in prospect of death.

He knew that death was astride his pathway and they saw how he still had peace and composure and was determined to see it through even from this vantage point. That simple qualification would suffice to disabuse any of them of any notion that he was thinking of an external condition which implied the absence of turmoil or even of a subjective condition without turmoil. Because you see the circumstances surrounding Jesus were always full of turmoil after the opening few months of his ministry.

It was reasonably peaceful for the first four, five, six months maybe. But when the first four, five or six months had gone we cannot say exactly. Turmoil began.

People began to argue and bicker and question and doubt. And not only that, they threw stones and they tried to get rid of him. Even in Nazareth, his own home, they tried to kill him.

They did all sorts of things to waylay him until at last the very leaders of the nation plotted that he should be put to death. They decided they must get rid of him. His circumstances were circumstances of turmoil.

You know, you and I often miss this other ingredient in our Lord's experience. He was troubled in his own soul. And we've got to understand this reference to peace against that background.

Jesus himself often experienced inward turmoil of a kind. Listen to this, John 12, 27 and 28. My heart is troubled.

And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. You see, he could see the cross. He knew what was coming.

He knew all the horror of it before it was there. And we read that his heart was troubled. He said so.

It isn't the commentary of the disciples. It's the confession of Jesus himself. His disciples recognized this fact more than once.

And they referred to it themselves as, for example, in John 13, 21, where we read, after he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me. He was troubled in spirit. He acknowledged in Gethsemane that his soul was, quote, very sorrowful, even unto death.

Matthew 26, 38. Whilst the inspired record refers to that also, as a condition of being sorrowful and troubled. Evidently then, Jesus was not immune to inward commotion.

And we sometimes equate peace with the absence of inward commotion. What then was this heart of his peace? Brothers and sisters, I believe it is this. If you quarrel with me, tell me some other time.

But I believe it was this. It was the fact that he walked with the Father, spoke the Father's word, went to do the Father's will, and he knew that the Father was pleased with what he was doing. This was the heart center of his peace.

It was the knowledge that he was pleasing to the Father. Men scowled at him. They got angry.

But he saw beyond men's scowling faces. He saw the Father's smile upon him. And because the Father smiled, because he was well-pleasing to the Father, and he knew that, and the Spirit witnessed to that in

his human experience, that was peace.

There was a commotion within him of being troubled, and outside it was dark and dismal and horrifying and terrifying. Nevertheless, he had peace. And so he was able to plan his own death.

He set the motion. You read through the Gospels and you see that it's Jesus that determines the plan. Of course, he arranges it to coincide with the feast in Jerusalem, but it's he who arranges the program.

He moves forward step by step according to his will. You see, he had this peace. He was moving with God, and God was pleased in him.

And of course, this is what God said at least three times. This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Peace is the knowledge of that.

You can take the turmoil, you can take the sting. I have letters every other week that are very stinging, and some that are quite opposite. I had one waiting on my desk this morning.

I didn't like it at all. But listen, my friend, there is a place of peace if you're doing what God has called you to do, going where God has called you to go, being what God has called you to be, you can be at perfect peace and sleep in it. The gift of his own peace, which he thus bequeathed, he also qualified negatively.

Not as the world gives goodbye to you. I'm not going into that because my time is running through, but let me come to say this. I believe that what he really meant there was this.

The world can't give you anything like this. Now, if you don't quite accept that exegesis, well, we'll talk it over sometime, all right? But I think that's what he meant, that, you see, the peace he gives has an impact on the recipient. You can't carry this peace around like a little parcel under your arm or in your heart and say, I've got God's peace.

You go your own sweet way. You can't do that. It's not a parcel.

It's not something distinct from yourself. When the peace of God comes into you, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in you, and it impacts upon mind, heart, conscience, will, and every fiber of your being. In other words, it makes you peaceful.

And there are many people, you see, who want the peace of God, but they're not willing to be peaceful in relation to others. You can't have it. The jagged edges of God go in you and in me if we would have the peace of God.

Of course, we'll be at war with sin, at war with evil, but not with people. Jesus put up with Judas for three and a half years. Just imagine that.

At war with the very sin of Judas and everybody else's. But he could put up with Judas. Peace makes you peaceful towards people.

You're never going around through your life thinking that your business is to step on other people's toes, socking everybody else theologically under the skin, putting everybody else in his place, and you as a kind of judge of all. No, no. You become peaceful.

And you can't have God's peace without becoming peaceful. Peace-making, peace-giving, peace-imparting. I well remember how this lesson first came home to me in something that's now history.

It was ten years after the massacre of the Yorker missionaries. One of them, named Chemo, was in England, and he was talking to a group of Christian people, and they were asking him questions after he had spoken. And one of the men present asked him a question something like this.

What was it that impressed you that really brought you to Christ? And this dear man had no doubt at all. Oh, he said, it's the way the widows came back. Not with a spear under their cloaks, or some plan to get rid of us, or to hit us back.

But what they had under their cloaks, if they had anything, was a gospel. And the widows of the very people that we had killed came back, and they stood there, and they were happy in Jesus, and they preached forgiveness to us. They were peaceful.

And because they had the peace of God, they were peace-making. They were spreaders of peace. Brothers and sisters, this is the way the gospel moves.

If you would have the peace of God, somehow or other, it has to have an outlet through your life, and breathe peace upon those who are seeking peace in God's way. John Macefield's poem, The Everlasting Mercy, is worth reading. Now, I don't quote a lot of poems from this pulpit.

My brother, Don McLeod, reads more than I do, I'm sure. But I can't bypass this, because it meant so much to me. He describes the drunkard that was Saul Cain.

He was converted. And you know, there are two stanzas there. They really are worth their weight in gold, or if you think dollars are more than gold, say dollars.

But here they are. Oh, the man's converted now, you see. He's a Christian.

And he was an ugly man before, spiritually. Oh, glory of the lighted mind, he says. How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind.

The station brook to my new eyes was babbling out of paradise. The waters rushing from the rain were singing, Christ is risen again. I thought all earthly creatures knelt from rapture of the joy I felt.

That was conversion. It was not, however, an end in itself, a maze filled with true insight proceeds. I did not think.

I did not strive. The deep peace burned my me alive. Oh, brothers and sisters, have you got that? I would give all the money I've got.

There isn't much. But I'd give it all to be the author of those two lines. I did not think.

I did not strive. The deep peace burned my me alive. I became a new creature.

The bolted door had broken in. I knew that I had done with sin. I knew that Christ had given me birth to brother all the souls of earth.

And every bird and every beast should share the crumbs broke at his feet. That's peace. Christ's peace.

And so the command with which I close. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Don't be afraid.

Now this is not a slick philosophy. I remember hearing during the war and at other times people singing pack up your troubles and well, I mustn't try singing or you'll run out. In your own kit, bag and smile.

And you know it's the most baseless, irrational song ever sung. For there's no reason giving for smiling. And packing up your troubles.

There's no basis for it. It's just sheer emotional guts. Sounds nice.

But baseless. Foundationless. But here you see there's foundation for this.

I'm giving it to you. I'm going to die to procure it. I'm going to rise again to seal it.

I'm going back to the Father and the Holy Spirit who is a counselor no less than I. Co-equal with the Father and with the Son. He will come and he will be the other paraclete. Not only to walk with you and talk with you but to live in you and that forever.

And peace is the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus bought it. He paid for it.

It was made. Hours on Calvary's cross by his blood. And he says I've made full provision not only for that but to bring it from heaven into your heart.

So he says it's very wrong for you to worry. Set your troubled hearts at rest. Stop worrying.

Because I have made provision. And if you believe in me then you should have this expectation of faith and move out into life however restless or full of commotion it may be. Trust me.

Have you received the Christ who is the author of peace? Is he your Savior? If so, thank God this morning. Bless God this morning. In your heart let music ascend.

Let the melody of worship ascend to the throne of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Let that happen now. But what if you haven't? My friend, this is still the day of salvation.

I'm so glad of that. And it is my great privilege today to be able to say that Jesus has not withdrawn yet those words which say him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out come to him. And make the seat on which you're sitting the altar on which you place yourself body, soul and spirit to be his and all the redemption his blood purchased and all that is involved in it is yours as a gift and peace is part of it.

It's a wonderful privilege to meet like this, isn't it? To proclaim and to hear a gospel such as this. May it be ours as we go our several ways and may we become peaceful to spread it for the world is languishing in need of it and if we do we shall find that gradually it will percolate and penetrate into the segments of society and perhaps some of us will have the opportunity of influencing governments, local, national, international bodies in the way of peace. God grant it to his glory.

Our Heavenly Father we thank you for your word and we ask that it might please you to lead us in the way of its truth. If you find rebellion in any of our hearts please be merciful to us and yet we'd rather have your hand be ruthless with us in exterminating sin now than that we should be left in our natural state to die. Spirit of God breathe upon us therefore and lead us in the way of life and light and peace through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

Amen.

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