

The Counsel of Peace

by John Nelson Darby

The Counsel of Peace is a deliberate purpose of God to bring peace between God and man through Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Zechariah 6:13, Romans 5:1, Philippians 4:6

Topics: "Assurance of Salvation", "Peace in Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the 'Counsel of Peace' between God and Jesus, illustrating how all prophecies ultimately point to Christ and His glory. He explains that true peace is not merely a feeling but a profound assurance rooted in the completed work of Christ, who serves as our High Priest. Darby reassures believers that despite present trials, they can experience God's peace, which is independent of their circumstances. He highlights that this peace is established through Christ's sacrifice and is a gift from God, meant to sustain believers amidst their struggles. Ultimately, the sermon calls for reliance on Christ alone for peace, rather than on personal efforts or feelings.

Transcript

"THE COUNSEL OF PEACE"

Zechariah 6 : 13

This chapter, written after the return of the Jews from Babylon, and when they were seeking to rebuild the temple, was intended to encourage them in that work. It speaks therefore of Joshua, Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah (those who had come from Babylon), by name. But "no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" ; and although some event previously to take place may occupy the chief part of it, the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is looked forward to as the ultimate point, the true consummation. So here, after an allusion to the history of God's providence in the four great monarchies, and to the judgment of Babylon, the prophet comforts the hearts of those who were returned thence with a direct prophecy of Christ.

Christ is the great object of the love of God, and the Spirit of God in Scripture always looks on to Him. No matter what the substance of the prophecy, no matter what the circumstances of those addressed, He looks forward, seeing all things as they concern Christ, and His future glory. The Jews, for instance, had many deliverers raised up for them of God in times of need (Neh. 9 : 27)-"saviours who saved them out of the hand of their enemies" ; but the moment the Holy Ghost begins to speak of these many "saviours," He ever looks out further: they were all but types Of THE "Saviour." When Adam fell, and judgment came

in, Christ is promised, the woman's Seed, as the bruiser of the head of the serpent. After the trial of Abraham's faith in Isaac, the promise is made unto his Seed, " which seed is Christ." Again, " out of Egypt have I called my son," we are taught, referred to Christ. And so here: " He shall build the temple of the Lord; even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne." It is " the man whose name is The BRANCH " who shall do all this. Zerubbabel is merely a type. Nothing is spoken casually, but all with a view to the ultimate purpose of the glory of God in Christ. Whether it affect the destinies of man, of Israel, or of the church, all centre in Jesus ; God's thoughts about Jesus are marked on all.

It must have been a great comfort to the saints of old to have future glories thus opened to them, for whenever the Holy Ghost had awakened spiritual desires in any heart, those desires could not be satisfied with anything then seen of temporal deliverance or blessing. Much had they to thank the Lord for-to sing His praise for what He had done; but there was always either the actual presence of evil, or the fear of danger and evil still. In the days of Josiah, when there was so great a returning to the ways of the Lord, and such a passover kept that the like of it had not been since the days of Samuel the prophet, yet even then was Jeremiah uttering denunciations against the evil of the people, and the Spirit of God, in denouncing their sin, ever referred to the new covenant, holding out the Lord Jesus as the One in whom alone the fulness of blessing was to centre.

And so with the church now. We have indeed greater blessings and clearer revelations, but still there is evil, for we are yet in the body. In times of the greatest revivals, there has ever been that mixed with them which tended to evil. We have surely much cause to thank God and rejoice, but nothing really to satisfy. We must still be looking onward to the future blessings in Christ. Never, till He appears, will the full desires of our hearts be given us ; never, until we " awake in his likeness," shall we really be " satisfied." Nothing less will suffice, because the Spirit of Christ is in us. Constant dissatisfaction and constant thanksgiving meanwhile , for, if we know Jesus risen, nothing short of the full power of His resurrection can content. Our hopes run on to God's ultimate purpose of complete blessing.

And here we have unity of hope with the Jews. They, indeed, are looking for earthly glory-their city and temple being rebuilt, etc.-that part of the future blessing in Christ of which Psalm 72 speaks ; and we also look forward to see the earth " filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah.." whilst Christ's own proper portion in the heavenly glory is our peculiar hope. Both earthly and heavenly glories meet in Jesus, and will be manifested when He comes. He is the Head of both. " The counsel of peace " is between Jehovah and the Messiah.

But where is Jesus now? As " the man whose name is The BRANCH," the " priest upon his throne "-an earthly throne-He does not yet rule ; peace is not yet established upon the earth, for Satan is yet exercising his power. But

there is a throne upon which He does sit. He has sat down upon the " Father's throne "-at the right hand of the Majesty on high," and this " when he had by himself purged our sins." There He is as the High Priest of His people. And thus is given to us a plain revelation of " the counsel of peace." Peace is our portion even now. We are set in the exercise of faith, by which we know and have this peace in our souls, whilst waiting for its establishment on the earth, and the time of the manifested glory.

There is a " counsel of peace " which belongs to us, an assured peace, peace indeed in the midst of present trouble, but still God's peace. If it were not God's peace, it would be good for nothing. I may, it is

true, have my spirit much disturbed, and know trial of heart ; but still I have a title to perfect peace amidst it all-not only peace with God, but peace concerning every circumstance, because God is " for us " in it all.

Had not man been in rebellion against God, there would have been no need for "the counsel of peace." Adam in paradise needed it not. But man has rebelled, and, though its modifications may be various, rebellion against God is still the characteristic of the unconverted heart. Such was his rebellion, that peace between man and God seemed impossible. But now, wondrous grace! we see that there is not only peace, but a " counsel of peace "-thoughts of God concerning peace, thoughts which Jesus alone could meet. " Lo, I come to do thy will, O God! "

Supposing God had made peace with Adam, the peace could not have lasted : the enmity in the heart of man, or that produced by the power of circumstances thwarting his will, would very soon have broken it again. Look at Israel. They were placed in outward peace with God, owned as His people, favoured in every way ; and yet what was the result ? Continual murmuring on their part, constant rebellion. As to moral peace with God, they had scarcely undertaken to keep His law when they set up a golden calf to worship, and thus failed directly. And it would always be the same; it must be so, for the very will of man is altogether wrong ; "the carnal mind is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

But now " the counsel of Peace " is between God and Jesus, instead of man, and hence security. It is not merely peace, but " the counsel of peace." The word " counsel " implies deliberate purpose. What solidity must there be in that peace which God had a " counsel " about, and all the engagements of which the mind of Jesus fully entered into and accomplished! I have said that peace is our proper portion as the children of God-peace both as to sin and as to circumstances. Now it is true that the latter we have not outwardly yet, but God is taking up all that concerns us, and has taken upon Himself to make " all things work together " for our good ; and the knowledge of this gives peace (if we will use our privilege) in all circumstances, be they even those of trial, perplexity, and sorrow. Was it not so with Jesus ? who can be so tried as He ? " Consider him that endured such contradictions of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds " ; yet He had always peace. And so might we: " Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."

But then it is most important to see that " the counsel of peace " is entirely between God and Jesus. The moment we begin to rest our peace on anything in ourselves, we lose it. And this is why so many saints have not settled peace. Nothing can be lasting that is not built on God alone. How can you have settled peace ? Only by having it in God's own way. By not resting it on anything, even the Spirit's work, within yourselves, but on what Christ has done entirely without you. Then you will know peace ; conscious unworthiness, but yet peace. In Christ alone God finds that in which He can rest, and so it is with His saints. The more you see the extent and nature of the evil that is within, as well as that without and around, the more you will find that what Jesus is, and what Jesus did, is the only ground at all on which you can rest.

God could no more rest in anything here, than Noah's dove could find a rest for her feet amidst the wrath and destruction that deluged the world. But Jesus comes in, and here-on this earth, where honour to God was wanting-here He glorified God. When God's eye rested upon Jesus, He was perfectly satisfied. Till that moment God had not seen anything in this earth of which He could say, as of itself, in this " I am well pleased." He had gone on, it is true, dealing with man in love and grace, but He could find nothing wherein to rest. " They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth

good, no, not one," etc., was what God saw when he " looked down from heaven." But when Jesus was searched throughout, nothing was found but perfect love and perfect devotedness to God ; even when forsaken of God, He still justifies Him-" thou art holy." Had it ended there, had it been only Christ's own perfectness, all the result would have been to shew out the more clearly our sinfulness and ruin by the contrast. But according to " the counsel of peace," He gave Himself. Peace was ever His ; it was for us that He " made peace by the blood of the cross " ; and thus is He, unto God, a " sweet savour of rest " for us.

Our peace is established in what He did, and " the counsel of peace " is " between them both." Jesus has accomplished that which God purposed towards us. In order to this, it was needful that He should " bear our sins," and this He did as the " sin-offering." He was made " sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." In the sacrifices, when the offerer laid his hand upon the head of the victim, there was in that act the complete identification of himself with the victim. Now there are two great characters in the sacrifice of Christ : the one, that of the burnt-offering; the other, that of the sin-offering. We lay our hands on Him as the " burnt-offering," thus identifying ourselves with Him. " Accepted in the beloved," all His perfectness, all His " sweet savour " unto God is ours. But then as to the " sin-offering," it is just the reverse with the hand laid upon the victim; it became identified with my sins, charged with my guilt.

Well, beloved, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus had this double character. He has completely accomplished the purpose of God, all that which was in " the counsel of peace." This cc counsel of peace " was not between me and God, though I have, as the fruit of it, the enjoyment of the peace I had not to do with it in any sense ; it was " between them both." All is done, and Jesus, both the accomplisher and the accomplishment, in proof that all is finished, has sat down on the throne of God.

But it may perhaps be added, Why, if the work is perfectly accomplished, is He yet a Priest upon the throne ? He is not there at all as a Priest to work out righteousness for us : that He has done, and done completely: " this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God." His sitting down is the proof that He has nothing more to do in that way for His friends, and now He only waits " till his enemies be made his footstool."

But then, in order that we may have the enjoyment of these things, He is acting in another way as Priest. Having the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, we consequently see many things in ourselves contrary to Him-many things that would hinder fellowship with God. Now here it is that the present ministry of Christ comes in. We need His priesthood in order to maintain our communion with God; we need Him in our daily sins, as it is said, " if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." We need the presence of perfect righteousness on our behalf before God ; who has ever before His eyes, and that " for us," the accomplisher of " the counsel of peace," " Jesus Christ the righteous."

Here then is " the counsel of peace " which was purposed between God and Jesus. Here, and here only, have we peace. If ever our souls have any idea of rest except in that which is the perfect rest of God; if ever we are looking for peace anywhere else, be it where it may, we have got out of God's way of accomplishing peace, off the ground of this " counsel of peace." He has not called us into " the counsel," which really is entirely independent of ourselves-" between them both "-accomplished, sure, and everlasting. Nothing can ever touch it. God has publicly owned His acceptance of Christ's work, by seating Him at His own right hand. The Holy Ghost is sent to witness to us that Jesus is now " on the throne of God," having " by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

We may have a great deal of trial (we know we shall), trial from circumstances around, trial from within, exercise of conscience, and the like but still we have the perfect certainty of God's favour ; and if God be for us, who can be against us?" With Paul we may reckon, because of His having given Jesus for us, along with Jesus upon everything. This is the true way to reckon upon His kindness-" Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus." Observe, he says, " the peace of God." Again, the word is " be careful for nothing " : if one single thing were excepted, God would not be God. Well, if exercised, and troubled in spirit, tempted to be " careful," let us go to God about it. Our wishes may possibly be foolish wishes : still, let us go and present them to God ; if they are so, we shall very soon be ashamed of them.

We have need of this " counsel of peace," because all that we are in ourselves is enmity against God. I cannot go out of this " counsel " to look at my own heart for a moment: it is " between them both." Is the Christian to make Christ's cross less complete ? On that alone his peace can rest. The moment we come to establish its perfectness, the moment we seek to add a single thing, we are adding to, or rather taking away something from, the perfectness of " the counsel of peace."

Who or what shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ? shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ? No, these things shall, as means for mortifying the flesh, only minister to Christ's glory. Shall death ? It will only bring us into His presence. Shall life ? It is that by which we enjoy His favour. " Nothing shall separate " 1 He is " on the throne " as the eternal witness of peace accomplished, and thence He ministers it to us.

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