

EXPERIENCING CHRIST'S PEACE

14 Do not let your heart be troubled; trust in God, trust in me also. ²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I am going to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me; so that where I am, you may be also ...

²⁵I have told you these things while I was still with you. ²⁶But the Counselor whom the Father will send in my name—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you all things and remind you of everything that I said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; I give my peace to you. I do not give it to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled; neither let it be fearful.

²⁸You heard me tell you that I am going away and that I will come to you. If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it does occur you may believe. ³⁰I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of the world is coming. He finds nothing in me; ³¹but in order that the world may know that I love the Father, I will do just as the Father commanded me. Get up, let us leave. (Jn. 14:1-3, 25-31)

Introduction

Don was a Christian man who worked for the railroad. He and the rest of his co-workers knew that trouble was brewing; a strike was inevitable. An undercurrent of bitterness about wage demands and working conditions had buzzed through the company for some time.

Then, while Don was on vacation, over the radio he heard the report that his co-workers had gone out on strike. Even though he was on vacation, Don immediately called one of the officers of his union. The official confirmed the report and informed Don of an up-coming union meeting.

As Don drove to that emergency meeting, he thought back over his fifteen years as a fireman on the railroad. Even though he was a Christian, he had always been very vulnerable to peer pressure, both in high school and at work. He had gone through a period of being one person at church and at home, and a different person at work. Gradually, though, he had become stronger in his Christian life; his commitment to Christ had become firmer, and the men at work began to see the difference in him. More and more he was finding a mission field among his fellow workers whose marriages were in trouble. Some of the men would ridicule him in public, but privately they would unburden their hearts to him, asking questions, sharing hurts, opening up to discuss spiritual things.

The union meeting that night was bedlam. Some of the men were already drunk and in an ugly mood. The union's strategy was to get a federal judge to refuse to issue an injunction that would force the striking workers to return to their jobs. It was very evident that the company had done much to instigate the strike in the first place.

Throughout the remainder of his vacation, Don worked for the strike effort, and when he was due to report back to work, he joined his fellow workers on the picket line. About five weeks into the strike, Don was approached by a Christian lawyer at church. "Are you working?" asked the lawyer. "No," replied Don. "Don't you know that you are breaking the law? Your union has called a wildcat strike, which is illegal under the National Railway Labor Act."

Don protested, "As far as I know no one else is working either." Deep down Don felt uncomfortable about the wildcat strike, but he also knew that he was not strong enough to face the heckling and the threats that would come if he crossed the picket line and went back to work. Even as he protested, a fellow worker and fellow Christian standing nearby spoke up, "I'm still working."

Now Don had to face the issue: Was he staying out on strike because he believed the union was within their rights? Or was the real reason the peer pressure brought to bear upon him by his fellow workers?

Finally, Don resolved to go back to work. He consented to work the night shift, when there would be no picket lines to face. Although the night shift meant there were no picket lines to cross, Don knew that it was inevitable that the union would find out that he had broken ranks, and when the strike was over he would be identified with the "scabs." Don was aware of the hatred and rejection the "scabs" would certainly face when the strikers returned to work.

Several weeks later that day came. How would Don handle that hatred and rejection? How would he handle the trial he was about to face?

Because we live in a spiritually hostile environment that can at times threaten us and cause us to become anxious and flee in fear, we need to appreciate the fact that we have access to Christ's sustaining peace. When you encounter a threatening situation, you need not be overcome by fear or anxiety; you, as a Christian, can experience Christ's sustaining peace.

I. You Can Experience Christ's Peace, Because It Is His Legacy to His People

In verse 27 the Lord Jesus declares that peace is the legacy He leaves to His disciples; peace is what He bequeaths to them in His departing hour: "*Peace I leave with you; I give my peace to you. I do not give it to you as the world gives.*" In writing his last will and testament, a man may bequeath his wealth, his house, his land, his possessions; who except the Lord Jesus Christ can bequeath his peace? It is Christ's own peace that He gives to His church, the very peace that enabled Him to sleep in the midst of violent storms at sea; to calmly encounter the demon-possessed; to confidently confront His sworn enemies who were intent on His destruction; to allow Himself to be taken captive by those very enemies; to maintain His composure during the mockery of a trial; and then at the end, to commend Himself into His Father's hands as He hung upon the cross of Calvary.

What is the essence of this peace Christ possessed, and that He graciously bequeaths to His church? It is the knowledge that God the Father is present with Him in this world; as He testifies, *"But a time is coming, and has [already] come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will forsake me. Yet I am not forsaken, for my Father is with me"* (Jn. 16:32.) It is the knowledge that God the Father has bestowed upon Him divine authority—all is under the Father's control and under Christ's control: *"The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands"* (Jn. 3:35.) It is the knowledge that when He departs this world He will be received into the Father's presence: *"I came forth from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father"* (Jn. 16:28.) This is the peace Jesus possesses, by virtue of His righteousness and acceptance with God His Father, and this is the peace Jesus bequeaths to His church.

It is a genuine peace; Jesus declares, *"I do not give it to you as the world gives"* (vs. 27.) "Peace to you" was a common form of greeting and farewell in that day, as it is today. But when the world utters those words it is uttering an empty, meaningless cliché; or at best a sincere hope expressed by one who is powerless to fulfill that hope. But when Jesus pronounces His blessing of peace, He is able to actually impart this blessed peace of God to your very soul.

You can experience Christ's peace, because it is His legacy to His church: *"Peace I leave with you; I give my peace to you."*

II. You Can Experience Christ's Peace, When You Exercise Confidence in Him

No sooner does Jesus make the promise of peace than He immediately makes the demand that His disciples exhibit courage: *"Peace I leave with you; I give my peace to you. I do not give it to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled; neither let it be fearful"* (vs. 27.) Jesus exhorts His disciples, *"Do not let your heart be troubled."* The Greek word (ταράσσω) literally means, "to stir up," or, "to shake up;" it means to be emotionally unsettled, disturbed, thrown into confusion. Jesus is exhorting His disciples not to allow themselves to be thrown into convulsions of anxiety and inner turmoil. Jesus then goes on to exhort them, *"neither let [your heart] be fearful."* The Greek term used here, (δειλιάω), means, "to be timid," "to be cowardly." When confronted with a threatening situation, our natural reaction is one of anxiety and fright, which usually results in flight.

Jesus exhorts us as His disciples to exhibit courage: *"Do not let your heart be troubled; neither let it be fearful."* He calls upon them to exhibit a courage that stems from confidence in Him: *"Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God; trust in me also"* (Jn. 14:1.) As His disciples are about to enter troubled waters—the rapids that are about to buffet their lives against the rocks with satanic fury—Jesus gives this counsel: Place your confidence in Me.

Jesus counsels His disciples to have the same confidence in Him that they have in God: *"You trust in God, trust in me also."* Actually, Jesus' words here are a gentle

rebuke. He is exhorting His disciples to remember and renew their trust in the God of the Bible; and then to place the same confidence in Him that they have in God His Father. What is Jesus saying here? He is telling us that He is equal with God the Father; He is worthy to receive the wholehearted trust and confidence of God's people. He is telling us that He is as reliable as God the Father; He is deserving of the complete confidence and trust of God's people.

The disciples were well aware that the entire Old Testament was a revelation of God's covenant faithfulness to His people. Throughout the pages of the Old Testament there was inscribed for the disciples the great events that bore testimony to the LORD's sovereign power and covenant faithfulness: He delivered His people, Israel, out of their Egyptian bondage. He sustained and protected them in the wilderness. He preserved them from the Assyrian onslaught in the days of King Hezekiah. He brought them back to the Promised Land of Canaan after the seventy-years of Babylonian captivity. In the Old Testament there was recorded for the disciples the testimony to the LORD's faithfulness made by the great men of God. There was the testimony of Moses:

Know, therefore, that Jehovah your God, he is God; he is the faithful God who keeps his covenant and lovingkindness to a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commandments. (Deut. 7:9)

There was the testimony of Joshua:

Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises Jehovah your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. (Josh. 23:14)

There was the testimony of David: *"Your love, O Jehovah, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies" (Psl. 36:5.)*

There was the testimony of Jeremiah: *"Because of Jehovah's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23.)*

Jesus is gently exhorting His disciples to remember and renew their confidence in the God of their fathers; and to likewise place their confidence in Him, the eternal Son of God. Christian, no matter how great the trial may appear, the record of God's faithfulness is greater—the Savior counsels us, "Place your confidence in Me."

You can experience Christ's peace, when you exercise courage based on confidence in Him. As the hymn writer, Frances R. Havergal, expresses it:

Every joy or trial falls from above,
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of love.

We may trust Him fully all for us to do;
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.

Set upon Jehovah,
Hearts are fully blessed,
Finding as He promised,
Perfect peace and rest.

The natural reaction to a threatening situation is that of anxiety, fear, and flight, oftentimes allowing our imaginations to run wild and assist us in scaring ourselves to death even before we have encountered the foe. Christ's prescribed way of handling a threatening situation is to exhibit courage based upon a confidence in Him, with the result being the experience of His sustaining peace: *"You will keep him in perfect peace, [him whose] mind is set [on you]; because he trusts in you. ⁴Trust in Jehovah forever; for Jehovah, Jehovah, is an everlasting Rock"* (Isa. 26:3-4.) May the testimony and confidence of the Psalmist also become our experience: *"I have set Jehovah always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved"* (Psl. 16:8.)

Conclusion

What happened with Don Booth when the railroad strike ended and he had to face the returning workers who had held out to the bitter end?

Shortly after operations had returned to normal, Don was assigned to the blast furnace area where he had to encounter the men most bitter towards those who broke ranks and went back to work, men whom they derisively called "scabs." When he walked into the locker room all conversation stopped, all eyes were riveted on him with cold hatred. On his locker someone had written, "Don is a ___ Christian scab."

Every day Don had sat in his car before work and had pleaded with the LORD for the courage to face these fellow workers. Now, as he stood before that locker, and as he turned to face those men and the day of work before him, he testifies,

I can't explain the feeling of peace and strength that flowed through me as I turned to face those men and go to work. I knew now that I could face any challenge they might want to add.

For years I had wanted to be "one of the boys," and I had gone out of my way to find security in being like them. But now, more alone than I had ever been in my life, I was aware that Jesus stood with me. I remembered the 23rd Psalm, feeling a little of what it must be like to "walk through the valley of the shadow of death." I thought of the martyrs who had faced much more: the rack, the fire. And I discovered that my security had to come from my relationship with God, not

from my relationship with my peers—whether in the church or at work.
(*POWER*, 5/4/86, p. 7)

When we encounter a threatening situation, we need not be overcome by anxiety or fear; we can experience Christ's sustaining peace. We can experience Christ's peace, because it is His legacy to His church. We can experience Christ's peace, as we exercise confidence in Him.