

KEPT IN PERFECT PEACE

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Isaiah 26:3-4.

Looked at from any viewpoint, life appears to be a struggle. The man of science, for example, pursues his investigations not as a mere search for facts but as a conflict against ignorance. Every discovery he makes is a fort captured from the enemy, and insures the liberation of some who have hitherto been bound. The ordinary individual too, who is not distinguished by any special rank in the array of contestants, but who has set his heart upon living a high and holy life, is entered upon a real struggle. His very ambition involves him in a lifelong campaign against the forces of evil.

Daily the question is asked, How can peace be brought to our fretful and stormy lives? How can our discord be turned into harmony? How can our restlessness be subdued? How can our divided personalities be unified? We may never have stated our difficulty in just these words, but we are ready to admit that these are the questions to which our hearts crave answers. We are on a quest for personal peace.

The confusion which reigns in our world is distressing. There always has been more or less friction in human relations. Cain slew Abel and the earliest records of the race contain accounts of wars. Competition in one form or another is as old as mankind. So is the search for food, with its urgency and peril. So is the quest for a mate, with its inevitable rivalry. Petrarch, the Italian poet and scholar, listed five enemies of peace -- avarice, ambition, envy, anger and pride. These causes of unrest have been operative from the beginning, but we do not covet the distinction of living in the stormiest period of the world's history.

Sinister forces keep driving us into situations which nurture enmity. Nation views nation with mixed sentiments of fear, suspicion and hatred. Economic ambitions and jealousies, nationalistic aspirations and racial antagonisms embroil the world. In industry there are controversies over such matters as hours and wages and fringe benefits. In business the situation is frequently so entangled that it is hard to draw the line between honesty and deception. In education the conviction is growing that we are imperiling our common life by trained hands and minds while we neglect to cultivate the only kind of character with which skill can be trusted.

In private life we see such glaring instances of inconsistency between profession and conduct that we wonder if honor, purity and Christianity are only meaningless words. In much of our modern literature all sorts of subjects are treated with cynical and shameless frankness and with such emphasis on the seamy side of life that young people, who are apt to believe all they read, are in danger of losing faith in God and respect for man.

Needless to say, this clutter of many things and interests is not restricted to the outer world. It is found also in the heart of man. Some of it is caused by a previous inner bewilderment; some of it is followed by a consequent personal disturbance. It is this turmoil which is hidden in the inward parts that supremely concerns us. For each one of us, this is an immediate and pressing problem.

No two people are distressed in precisely the same way. Each of us brings his own individuality and experience to every situation he encounters, and the impression he receives and the reaction he makes are determined largely by that fact. In one respect, however, we are alike. The heart of every one of us is the arena of a struggle. All of us have contradictory desires and emotions. We seek things which clash. We covet some objects which are not good for us. Desire and judgment are at war. Ambition outruns ability. Our personalities are divided. As Faust said:

"Two souls, alas! reside within my breast
And each withdraws from, and repels, its brother.
One with tenacious organs holds in love
And clinging lust the world in its embraces;
The other strongly sweeps, this dust above,
Into the high ancestral places."

Our problem is how to attain the inner concord we crave. Our coveted composure cannot be obtained by flight. The Psalmist said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." The real trouble does not lie in our surroundings but in our hearts. Escape does not offer a solution because we cannot run away from our souls. Obviously the remedy cannot be found in ourselves.

Isaiah was a man who found the secret of a quiet heart in a very unquiet world. He was a sensitive man and, therefore, felt pain very keenly. He was an artistic soul and, therefore, suffered much at the hands of crude and callous people. He was a profoundly religious man and, therefore, the sinfulness and spiritual indifference of men pressed upon his heart like an agonizing weight. Nevertheless, Isaiah found the secret of a quiet heart. From him we learn that two things are involved in this important matter. First, a quiet heart is the gift of God. Neither fame, power or money can create it or sustain it. Only God Who created our hearts can give them peace and rest. Until men learn this truth, they will continue without harmony. Second, the gift of a quiet heart is conditioned upon man's acquiescence in the will of God through faith and spiritual desire.

There is the desire on the part of men everywhere for peace of mind, and its resultant spirit of contentment. Isaiah offered to those whose color of life is drab the secret of perfect peace. He saw his world plunged into confusion and overwhelmed by catastrophe. Amid all the terror and strife of life, he had learned to trust in God. That was the secret of his victorious life.

Trust in God is one of the easiest of all things to express, and one of the hardest to practice. There is no grace more necessary, and when attained there is no grace more blessed and comforting. But, it is difficult of attainment. It requires a deep realization of the divine presence, of the divine wisdom, and of the divine love.

Trust in God implies an entire resignation to the wisdom of God, a dependence on the power of God, and a firm assurance of the goodness and veracity of God. It implies an humble dependence on Him for that protection and those blessings which His supreme perfections both enable and incline Him to bestow on His creatures; a full conviction of His goodness and mercy; and a steady hope that that mercy will, on all occasions, in all our dangers and necessities, be extended to us, in such a manner as to His wisdom appears most conducive, if not to our tranquillity in this life, to our everlasting felicity in the next.

As I attempt to draw these remarks to a close, there are two things in this text to which I want to call your attention.

1. The Requirement.

"Trust ye in the Lord for ever" (Isaiah 26:4). This is certainly wise counsel. Trust God for all the future. His mercy will never fail us. The trust which is required is such as arises from a consciousness of weakness and need. It is a trust in Him who is able to save, to strengthen and to comfort. It is a trust similar to, and yet far surpassing, the trust of a pupil in the teacher, a patient in the physician, a traveler in a guide, and a child in the parent. The way of wisdom is to rely simply and entirely on God. Trust in God is a condition of restfulness. It guarantees the strength which is necessary when the trials come.

Our text presents faith or trust as the mind resting on God. "Whose mind is stayed on thee." There is nothing in which we can safely trust except God. Faith in God is our strength in duty. Faith in God is our stay in trouble. Christ, whose own life was a model of perfect poise, commended to His disciples, as the secret of composure, an absolute trust in God. Much of our lack of poise is due to the fact that we are victims of groundless forebodings rather than letting our minds trust in the wide sweep of God's unfailing goodness. Christ knew the blessedness of perfect trust in God and perfect fellowship with Him.

2. The Result.

Perfect peace is the result of trust in God. Peace is desirable, whether it be peace with God, peace with conscience or peace with others. Peace is available. This peace is from God, given in grace and maintained in mercy. But this peace is ~~conditioned~~. ~~The mind must rely on God, the heart must be surrendered to God, the will must be surrendered to God, the life must be surrendered to God, the whole man must be surrendered to God.~~ The author of this peace is God. He offers peace to all who will receive it

as a gift through our Lord Jesus Christ, but it cannot be obtained from any other. When we trust in Him, place ourselves in His care and devote ourselves to His service, He promises to look after our welfare.

To trust in the Lord signifies that we shall be free from anxiety concerning any events, present or future, under a firm persuasion that God careth for us, and will direct all events for our real happiness and welfare. Peace comes to us through trust, submission and obedience -- the trust that says, "The Lord knoweth the way that I take"; the submission that says, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away"; and the obedience that says, "My meat and my drink is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

There is no peace of any kind for the person who ignores God. For those who know Him, love Him and serve Him there is peace "that passeth understanding" even in the midst of trials. A child of God is not immune from cares, but his troubles are tempered by His perfect peace.