

CHAPTER VIII

PEACE, PERFECT PEACE

"Jesus came and stood in the midst and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. . . . Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you."—John xx. 19, 21.

TRUE friendship will always be characterised by loving anticipation of our friend's needs, and loving forbearance with our friend's mistakes. These elements of true friendship are very clearly marked in our Lord's fellowship with His disciples. When He was about to die, knowing the perplexity, trial and sorrow that this would involve, He prepared His disciples for what was to come by His words, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." "Let not your heart be troubled." Thus did He lovingly anticipate their needs. Then, after His death, when all their hopes had vanished and their faith in Him was dead notwithstanding all His teaching and assurance about resurrection, His first word to them when He met them on the evening of the first Easter Day was, "Peace be unto you." Thus did He lovingly forbear with their mistakes.

As we look more closely, however, into the story of the Easter greeting of our Lord to His disciples, we find something deeper and fuller than mere

human friendship. Twice over, and not once only, our Lord greeted them with "Peace be unto you." What is the meaning of this repetition? Was it merely to reassure their hearts and to disperse their fears? Or was there not some deeper meaning suggestive of the twofold peace which He desired to bestow? We believe the latter view is the correct one, especially when His words to the disciples on the eve of His crucifixion are remembered, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you" (John xiv. 27). There seems to be some real and deep meaning in this repetition of "Peace"; and when we consider the matter more closely, we find that there is indeed a double peace which the Lord bestows upon His followers. This gift of a Divine twofold peace is one of the most precious lessons in the Christian life, and is one of the secrets of genuine Christian living. Let us look more closely into it.

PEACE THROUGH SALVATION

Consider the *need* of peace. To appreciate our Lord's greeting fully it is necessary to remember that there was a much greater need in the disciples' hearts than that of any mere reassurance after their fears. The great question of sin affects, and always must affect man's peace. Among the various and sad results of sin one of the saddest is

enmity against God and consequent estrangement from Him. Sin is the wilful setting up of self against God, and is therefore an offence against His Person, and an insult to His Divine character. This self-assertion of sin places a barrier between the soul and God, and one of the primary necessities of the spiritual life is the removal of the estrangement by the breaking down of the barrier. We may as well try to blend light and darkness as to palliate and gloss over the hostility and estrangement caused by sin. God must of necessity manifest towards sin the enmity of perfect holiness. Sin also produces enmity between man and man. The cause of hatred and malice with the consequent absence of all love and fellowship between men is found in the fact of sin. And even within man himself, there is conflict, estrangement and enmity between his higher and lower natures. This threefold enmity emphasises the urgent need of peace.

Consider the *source* of peace. The question naturally arises as to how this enmity can be destroyed and the estrangement removed. A still more accurate question would be whether it has not already been removed and destroyed? The answer is that it has been removed by the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. And this is evidently what our Lord meant His disciples to learn on that evening of the Resurrection. "He showed

unto them His hands and His side" (John xx. 20). Those tokens of His death at once revealed the fact of His death and prepared the way for their understanding of its meaning. The peace that He bestowed upon them was wrought out by His death; for as the Apostle clearly teaches, He has "made peace through the blood of His Cross." (Col. 1. 20). "He is our peace," for He has reconciled man unto God by the Cross, "having slain the enmity thereby" (Ephes. ii. 13-17). This, too, is what He Himself meant when He said "Peace I leave with you" (John xiv. 27). This was His legacy "left" to His disciples, and, as we know, a legacy only becomes available by means of and subsequent to death. From that time forward peace was at the very centre and heart of the Apostolic Gospel, for they went everywhere "preaching peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts x. 36). We can now readily understand why our Lord showed them at that moment His hands and His side. It was because His death, thus proved to them, was the ground and basis of the peace He there and then bestowed.

Consider the *means* of peace. How does this peace enter our hearts? "He *showed* them His hands and His side." It was a visible symbol and picture of that vision of the heart by which we become partakers of the peace which Christ offers and bestows. "Look unto Me, and be ye

saved" (Isa. xlv. 22). "They looked unto Him, and were lightened" (Psa. xxxiv. 5). "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. v. 1). It is by the look of faith that we understand and accept, appreciate and appropriate the Lord Jesus as our peace. This is the first aspect of the peace of the Risen Lord. And if we "acquaint ourselves with Him, and be at peace," our experience will soon be that of the disciples: "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord" (John xx. 20).

PEACE IN SERVICE

Forgiveness is only the first step in the Christian life. Service for God naturally follows. This, too, will need the experience of peace, a peace based upon the former experience, inseparably connected with but yet distinguishable from it. It was for this reason that our Lord said to them *again*, "Peace be unto you." The moment He had uttered the words the second time He added, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (ver. 21). It is clear, therefore, that this peace was for a purpose and object different from the former; and when we turn to our Lord's words on the night of the betrayal we find again this distinction of a twofold peace: "*My peace* I give unto you" (John xiv. 27). This is evidently dif-

ferent from "Peace I leave with you," by its reference to the peace which our Lord Himself had, His own peace all through those years of ministry. We cannot but be struck with the wonderful calm and restfulness of Christ in the face of all difficulties and opposition; there was no hurry, no excitement, no unrest, but everything full of quiet and peace. And this is the peace that our Lord gave to His disciples as He commissioned them for their task of world-wide evangelisation. A careful analysis of our Lord's own peace will show us what it means for all His followers to-day.

It is the peace of *uninterrupted communion*. From the first glimpse of our Lord at the age of twelve up to the time of the cross we can see that His life was spent in unbroken communion with His Heavenly Father. Those nights spent in prayer were only special manifestations of an entire life of communion. He lived above all earthly distractions and heedless of all turmoils. More than once His fellowship with God was tested, but it stood fast and firm. This, too, is a possibility for all His followers—the peace of uninterrupted communion. Whatever may be our circumstances and however great the pressure upon us in Christian work and warfare, His peace may be ours, and should be ours, moment by moment.

It is the peace of *unflinching confidence*. Our

Lord's communion with the Father was based upon trust, and elicited trust which never once failed. When tempted by Satan in the wilderness to avoid the cross and take a shorter pathway to the crown, He trusted His Father's wisdom and power. When He was opposed by the Jews He knew that He was safe until His hour had come. At the grave of Lazarus He said with unhesitating assurance, "I know that Thou hearest Me always." In Gethsemane He had no doubt about the succour of twelve legions of angels had they been required. Through every dark phase in His earthly life He had the perfect peace which comes from continual trust in God. So it may be with us. Our communion with God will deepen our confidence, and our confidence in turn will deepen our communion. We know Him and we therefore trust Him, and like Job we say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him," and like St. Paul, "I know Whom I have believed."

It is the peace of *unswerving obedience*. Communion and confidence had their blessed issue in obedience, as the predominant characteristic of our Lord's outward life. Our Lord realised fully the Psalmist's words, "I delight to do Thy will," and He Himself said in His earliest recorded words, "I must be about My Father's business." When opposed by the Jews He boldly said, "I do always those things that please Him." When in

Gethsemane He said, "The cup that My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" and on the cross He could say what no other man has ever been able to say, "I have finished the work that Thou hast given Me to do." The result of all this unswerving obedience was the peace and satisfaction which always come from faithful loyalty to God. This again may be our portion. "Great peace have they which love Thy law" (Psa. cxix. 165). "The work of righteousness shall be peace." Christian peace is always in proportion to our obedience. This is the second aspect of the peace of our risen Lord.

And when we inquire how it may become ours, the answer is given in our Lord's action as recorded in this chapter: "When He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (v. 22). It is by the possession of the same Holy Spirit which our Lord Himself possessed that this peace becomes ours. Our Lord is not only an example for us to copy; His resurrection gift enters the inner chambers of our being and enables us to realise His resurrection power in our life.

This twofold peace—"peace with God" and "the peace of God"—is no mere spiritual luxury, but an absolute necessity; nor is it for the purpose of meditative contemplation, but rather for practical activity and daily life. There is nothing

more practical and useful than Divine peace in the soul. The Apostle counselled the Christians at Ephesus to have their feet "shod with the *preparedness* of the Gospel of peace" (Ephes. vi. 15). God's peace can fill our hearts with joy and happiness, grace and blessing day by day (Rom. xv. 13). It can also keep us every moment, guarding our hearts and thoughts through Jesus Christ (Phil. iv. 7). Our foes are many, and mind and heart are liable to fail, but in the possession of Divine peace we have the secret of preservation and protection. God's peace can also rule our lives: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (Col. iii. 15). Like an umpire whose decision determines everything, peace should be and can be the arbiter in the soul, settling all things that are doubtful and guiding the life day by day.

The life of peace, therefore, is an absolute necessity as an essential part of vital Christianity. If only there were more peace within, there would be more power and progress without. The words of the prophet are still true, when they speak of the connection between government and peace: "His government and peace" (Isa. ix). First government, then peace. If the government of our life is upon Christ's shoulder, then "of the increase of peace" there will indeed be no end. The more we yield to Him and surrender to His con-

trol, the more and deeper will be our experience of peace; and day by day in faith and faithfulness we shall experience more and more of the old familiar words, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee."