

"Peace"

John 20: 19-21.

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In the passage which stands at the head of this paper we have the word "peace," in a twofold sense, first, as applied to the inner life; and secondly, to the outer life of the Christian disciple. "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus, and saith unto them, *Peace unto you*. And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side."

Here we have peace in its blessed application to the inner life. All was finished. The battle was fought, the victory gained. The Conqueror was in their midst — the true David with the head of the Philistine in His hand. All possible ground for anxiety was for ever removed. Peace was made, and established on a foundation that could never be moved. It was utterly impossible that any power of earth or hell could ever touch the foundation of that peace which a risen Saviour was now breathing into the souls of His gathered disciples. He had made peace by the blood of His cross. He had met every foe. He had encountered the marshalled hosts of hell, and made a show of them openly. The full tide of Jehovah's righteous wrath against sin had rolled over Him. He had taken the sting from death, and spoiled the grave of its victory. In a word, the triumph was gloriously complete; and the blessed Victor at once presents Himself to the eyes and to the hearts of His beloved people, and sounds in their ears the precious word "*peace*."

And then mark the significant action. "He showed them His hands and His side." He brings them into immediate contact with Himself. He reveals His Person to their souls, and shows them the unequivocal tokens of His cross and passion — the wondrous marks of accomplished atonement. It is a risen Saviour, bearing in His body the marks of that death through which He had passed for His people.

Now this is the secret of peace. It is a great deal more than knowing that our sins are forgiven, and that we are justified from all things, blessed as all this assuredly is. It is having before our souls — before the eyes of our faith — the Person of a risen Christ, and receiving from His own lips the sweet message of "peace." It is having in our hearts that holy sense of deliverance which springs from having the Person of the Deliverer distinctly presented to our faith. It is not merely that we know we are forgiven and delivered, but our hearts are livingly engaged with the One who has done it all, and we gaze by faith upon the mysterious marks of His accomplished work. *This is peace for the inner life*.

But this is not all. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace unto you. As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." Here we have the outer life of the Christian. It is all, from first to last, wrapped up in this one grand fact, he is sent into the world, as Jesus was sent by the Father. It is not a question of what he has to do, or where he has to go. He is one sent by Jesus, even as Jesus was sent by the Father; and ere he starts on this high and holy mission, his risen Lord ensures him perfect peace as to every scene and circumstance of his whole career.

What a mission! What a view of the life of a Christian! Do we at all enter into it? Let no one suppose for a moment that all this applies only to apostles. This would be a grand mistake. The passage on which we are dwelling does not speak of apostles. It speaks of "disciples," a term which surely applies to all the children of God. The very feeblest disciple is privileged to know himself as one sent into this world as Jesus was sent of the Father. What a model to study! What a place it gives us! What

an object to live for! How it settles everything! It is not a question of "views" — of opinions, dogmas, or principles — of ordinances or ceremonies. No, thank God; it is something quite different. It is life and peace — life in a risen Saviour, and peace for that life, both inward and outward. It is gazing upon a risen Saviour, and starting from His feet to serve Him in this world, as He served the Father.

And be it remembered that all this has a direct bearing upon the very youngest disciple in all the Church of God. We earnestly press this upon the reader, because some would have us to believe that it is something official, something which applied only to the apostles. Those who urge this idea build much on verse 23. But the fact is, the apostles never undertook to forgive sins in an official way. This passage has no such bearing; it refers to the discipline of an assembly of disciples, acting by the Holy Ghost, in the name and on the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, when the assembly at Corinth put away from among them the evil-doer, it was retaining of sins. And when they received him back, on the ground of his repentance, it was a remitting of sins.

Such is the simple meaning of John 20: 23. It does not touch the soul's eternal relation to God, but only its present relation to the assembly. Hence we should not allow ourselves to be robbed of the precious teaching of the entire passage through any false application of a particular clause.