SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

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BY

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SERMON V.

THE LEGACY OF CHRIST.

St. John xiv. 27.

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you:*

*not as the world giveth, give I unto you.*

That the Son of God might become the “mer­ciful and faithful High Priest” of his church, “it behoved him to be made in all things like unto his brethren;” not only to clothe himself in their outward form, but to take upon him also their inward nature. Hence in contemplating the wonderful history of his life, we see him influen­ced by the same affections that influence ourselves, and manifesting the same dispositions. From his cradle to his grave, we behold in him the Son of man, as well as the Son of God.

When he “knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto his Fa­ther,” we find him feeling and acting as many of his brethren have felt and acted on the bed of death. He thinks of the beloved friends from whom he is about to be separated, and is troubled in spirit at the thought of leaving them. He calls them around him to take of them a last farewell. In the most gentle and affectionate terms that lan­guage can supply, he tells them of the scene of sorrow through which he is about to pass; as­sures them that death itself shall not separate them from his love; strives to cheer them with the hope of one day seeing him again; gives them his dying blessing; and at length, “lifting up his eyes to heaven,” he commends them to his Father’s care, and supplicates for them the richest blessings.

Neither were these the only respects in which the dying Jesus acted as the dying man. When his end drew near, he made, as it were, his will and testament, and would not suffer the last inter­view with his disciples to close, before he had re­minded them of the precious gifts which he pur­posed to bestow upon them. Houses and lands indeed, silver and gold, he had none to give; but he bequeathed to them a treasure far more valua­ble than splendid mansions and extensive territo­ries; a treasure which silver and gold could never buy. “Peace,” he says, “I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”

What then is this peace of which the Saviour here speaks? In what manner has he given this blessing to his saints? These enquiries are natu­rally suggested by the words before us, and they are enquiries which have surely a claim on our attention. We do not refuse to listen to the words of a dying friend. We examine with more than common interest, the will and testament of one who has nothing but perishable riches to leave behind him. Let us not then turn away our ears from the parting words of Jesus, our best Friend. Let us not look with indifference on the last will of him, who has all the eternal treasures of earth and heaven at his disposal. Let us open it with some sense of its vast importance; and before our eyes are closed in death, may we all see our names written in it, and become the inheritors of its ever­lasting riches.

I. *What then is the blessing which Christ be­queaths to his disciples?* It is peace.

Now if there is any word which can excite pleasing sensations in the human breast, it is this word. If there is any blessing truly desirable, it is this blessing. It is as sweet to the children of men, as the long wished for shore to the mariner who is wearied with the labours of the ocean. It is as reviving, as the warm breezes of the spring to the man who has just risen from a bed of sick­ness. How welcome are the tidings of returning peace to a nation which has been long accustomed to the sound of war! How beautiful the feet of them who publish it! What gladness fills every heart! what joy sits on every countenance! what praises and thanksgivings are heard from every tongue!

But it is not amongst mankind only, that peace is thus highly esteemed. It is declared by the Almighty himself to be among the things which he calls good; one of the most precious mercies which he gives to his faithful servants. To bring down this blessing from above, was the great ob­ject of our Saviour’s appearing on the earth. To this end was he born, and for this cause came he into the world, to establish “the covenant of peace;” to preach “the gospel of peace;” to say unto Zion, that “her warfare is accomplished,” that peace is restored between her and her of­fended Lord. Hence the prophecies which an­nounced the coming of the Messiah, spoke of him under the character of “the Prince of peace.” Hence, when he was at length born in the city of David, peace on earth was proclaimed by the re­joicing angels, and connected with the glory of their God. Hence too, when he was about to leave his beloved disciples and to lay down his life for sinners, peace was the precious legacy he left them. And what was his language after he was risen from the dead? No sooner did he appear among his dejected followers, than the sound of peace was again heard. Jesus said unto them, “Peace be unto you.”

What then is this peace? Is it an exemption from the calamities of life, from sorrow and afflic­tion? What says the great Giver of it? “Ve­rily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep, and lament, and be sorrowful.” “In the world ye shall have tribulation.”

Is it peace with the world, an exemption from its hatred and persecution? How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled? “The servant,” says Christ, “is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”

1. The peace which Jesus came down from heaven to bring, is not an unhallowed peace with a sinful world; it is *peace with God,* reconciliation with that great and holy Being “in whom we live, and move, and have our being.”

The man who inherits this precious legacy, was once the enemy of the Lord. He was one of those, of whom the Almighty says, “My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.” He hated God, and God could not love him. He might indeed look on him with pity, but he could not regard him with approbation and de­light. This warfare is now for ever at an end. The sinner’s heart, the sinner’s character, are changed. The enmity of his carnal mind has been subdued. He has gone, as a repentant prodigal, to the throne of his heavenly Father, and has received a welcome and a pardon there. “Being justified by faith, he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” A covenant of peace has been entered into between the King of heaven and his once rebellious subject; it has been confirmed and sealed; and he has pledged his faithfulness and love, that it shall be “a per­petual covenant that shall not be forgotten.”

2. From this covenant of peace results another blessing comprehended in the Saviour’s legacy— *peace in the soul,* peace of conscience, inward serenity and rest.

This is a blessing which none but Christ can give, and none but his renewed people receive. Others may indeed seek it; they may rise early and late take rest to obtain that which they think will purchase it; but they spend their “money for that which is not bread,” and their “labour for that which satisfieth not.” They may perhaps find something which they may for a moment mistake for it; they may grasp the shadow, and imagine that they have found the substance; but until a man has been cleansed from his sins by the blood of Jesus, until his heart has been “sprinkled from an evil conscience” by the same blood, he must remain as far off from true peace of mind, as he is from God. He may possess the peace of Jonah who slumbered in the storm, a peace which is the token of approaching death; but he must become a humble, believing sup­pliant at a Saviour’s cross, before he can enjoy any peace that is worth possessing. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” It is his people only, who dwell in “a peaceable habi­tation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”

The peace which Christ bequeathed to his people, is further styled *his peace.* “My peace,” he says, “I give unto you.” It is the same peace that he himself enjoys; the same peace that kept his soul tranquil in the midst of all his sorrows upon earth; the same glorious rest into which he is now entered in his Father’s kingdom above.

As the precious oil that was poured on the head of Aaron, went down to the skirts of his garments, so the joy poured on Jesus as the Head of his church, descends to all his members, and the meanest of his people share in his ful­ness. He is gone into the kingdom of peace, as the forerunner of his saints. They are said to be “raised up together with him, and made to sit together in heavenly places.” They have, in some degree, already entered into the joy of their Lord. Even in this house of their pilgrimage, they re­ceive at seasons “the first fruits of the Spirit,” a portion of the happiness of their glorified Re­deemer, a foretaste of the eternal rest which remaineth for the people of God beyond the grave.

Thus then the peace spoken of by Christ in the words before us, is, first, peace with God, a share in that friendship which subsists between him and his well beloved Son; it is, secondly, inward peace, peace of mind, peace of the same kind, as that which Christ himself enjoys in his kingdom of glory. It is indeed inferior to it in degree, but it is of the same nature, and flows from the same living fountain, as the happiness of heaven.

II. Let us now proceed to enquire, secondly, *in what manner this precious peace has been given by the Redeemer to his people.*

The word which is here translated “give,” may be understood as signifying to bequeath, to give by will or as a legacy; and it is in this sense probably, that it was used on this occasion by our Lord. Neither is a long train of reasoning neces­sary to convince us of the propriety and beauty of this term. A little attention to the circumstances connected with the text, will show us at once its meaning and its force.

What was the situation of Christ when he ut­tered these gracious words? It was the situation of a man who sees himself standing on the brink of the grave, and who bequeaths to his friends all that he is possessed of, before he is taken from them. The Saviour knew that the hour of his departure was at hand, and he here leaves to his beloved disciples those blessings, which, as the Mediator of the church, he had at his disposal.

1. *The property which a man conveys by a will or testament, must be his own estate, his own pro­perty; and he must also have a right of transfer­ring it to others.* Thus the peace which Christ bequeathed to his disciples, was his own peace, a property to which he had an undoubted claim, and which he had also the power of conveying to others, of disposing of by will or in whatsoever manner he pleased. His blood purchased this property, his righteousness obtained it for his church. The price indeed was costly; all the angels in heaven, with their united riches, could not have paid it; but Jesus bought the blessing; he bought it by parting for a season with his throne and kingdom, with his honour and glory. He was the only being in the universe rich enough to purchase reconciliation for his people, and ra­ther than that his people should perish, he cheer­fully became poor for them, that they “through his poverty might be made rich.” Hence the apostle says that “God hath appointed him heir of all things for his church;” and that “it hath pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell.” Hence we find him bestowing the most precious blessings that he himself enjoys upon his children. “I appoint unto you,” he says, “a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.” “To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me on my throne.”

2. The peace which Jesus gives to his disci­ples, is like a legacy in this respect also—*it could never have been received and inherited, if the great Giver of it had not died.*

“Where a testament is,” says the apostle, “there must also of necessity be the death of the testator; for a testament is of force after men are dead, otherwise it is of no strength at all, while the testator liveth.” A man may leave to his friends abundant riches and treasures, but these gifts will profit them nothing till after he is dead; it is his death which gives them a title to the property, and puts them in possession of it. Thus if Jesus had not died, the blessings which he bequeathed to his people, would never have been theirs. He might have said, “Peace I leave with you,” but there would have been no peace for them. He might have said, “I go to prepare a place for you in my Father’s house,” but not one sinner would have entered the heavenly mansion; all the countless hosts of “just men made perfect,” who are now singing “Worthy the Lamb,” around the throne in heaven, would have been cursing the Being who mocked them, in the regions of despair. The blood of Jesus is the only claim, which a race of guilty creatures can offer to the offended Sovereign of heaven. It is only by means of his death, that they who are called, can receive the eternal inheritance promised to them.

But notwithstanding these points of resem­blance, there is something peculiar in the testa­ment of Christ. “Not as the world giveth,” he adds, “give I unto you.”

This language may be designed to remind us, that the blessings which Christ has left to his followers, are widely different in their nature from those things which men leave to their friends, far more valuable, more satisfactory, and more durable. They are more valuable. Men may leave behind them much silver and much gold, stately mansions, pompous titles, and proud distinctions; they may give to their heirs crowns and kingdoms; but what do these things profit them? What is their value, when compared with peace of conscience, with the friendship of the Almighty? They cannot make a man happy even in the day of prosperity; while the legacy of Christ, even in the darkest night of adversity, can “satisfy the longing soul, and fill the hungry soul with goodness.” Other legacies are all tem­porary; the hand of time and of death wrings them from our eager grasp, almost as soon as we have obtained them; but the gifts of Christ are all eternal. When heaven and earth shall pass away, there is not one of them that will perish, or be plucked out of its possessor’s hand. They will remain precious as ever, when every earthly treasure shall be heard of no more.

From the imperfect view which we have thus taken of the cheering words before us, the hum­ble and believing Christian may see *the security and stability of the divine promises.* Pardon and peace, grace and glory, are not only promised, but bequeathed, to him by the unalterable will of Christ, his Lord. The Testator is now dead, the testament is in force; and though it were but a man’s testament, “no man disannulled or addeth thereto.” “Let not” therefore “your heart be troubled,” brethren, “neither let it be afraid.” Possessed of such blessings as these, peace in your own consciences and peace with your God, let your souls “magnify the Lord,” let your spirits “rejoice in God, your Saviour.” Let the possession of these treasures cheer you in the want of every earthly good. Though poor and afflicted, let them make you more joyful, than the happiest heir to the most splendid riches. In every hour of trial and of sorrow, in every season of poverty and anxiety, think of the legacy of Christ, and be comforted.

Do you say that you are strangers to the peace of Christ, although you have reason to cherish an humble hope that you have been made partakers of his saving grace? If you are habitually going in sincerity and truth, with humility and faith, to the fountain which divine mercy has opened for sin and uncleanness, if you are really seeking there freedom from the defiling power of sin, as well as salvation from its fearful consequences, you cannot be destitute of peace with God. He never has regarded, he never will regard, with anything short of the tenderest love, the sinner who is the beloved of his Son, who has been washed with his blood and sanctified by his Spirit.

You may indeed be humble, believing Chris­tians, and yet be strangers to that inward peace which Christ has bequeathed to his people; but there is only one reason to be given, why you are strangers to it—you will not lay claim to and possess it. A man may have a precious legacy bequeathed to him, and he may be so infatuated as to refuse to accept it, or so indolent as to neg­lect the proper means of possessing himself of it; but still the legacy is his. It is his own folly, his own indolence only, that keep it from his hands. The very same causes, my Christian brethren, united with “an evil heart of unbelief,” may keep you strangers to the peace of God. It was from all eternity the property of your Saviour; by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, he has acquired the right of giving it to whomsoever he will; he has not only promised, but he has be­queathed it to all who seek and love him; he has put his dying will and testament into your hands in his gospel; he has bid you examine this will, and told you how to know whether your names are written in it; he has died a cruel and bitter death, that there may be no impediment nor delay in your obtaining his precious peace; he invites, he urges you to take it, and to enter into his joy;—the Lord Jesus Christ has done this, and more than this, to make you peaceful and happy; and yet you are strangers to his peace, and unacquainted with his blessedness. “How can these things be?” Either there is unfaith­fulness in the Holy One of Israel, or there is something wrong in you. Search well your hearts, and judge whether your want of peace arises from some defect in the will of Jesus, or from some evil in yourselves; whether you have not abundant reason to trace your despondency to unbelief, to slothfulness, to a carnal and worldly mind.

Although the pride of your heart may prevent you from at once discovering it, be assured that the cause of your doubts and perplexity is to be found in yourselves, and not in the faithful Jesus. Endeavour then to find where the evil lies, and, in dependence on divine grace, strive to root it out. Use the means appointed to establish yourselves in the faith; labour to grow in grace and knowledge. Bring your hearts and lives more frequently to the test of scripture; pray more fervently; use more diligently all the ap­pointed means of grace; watch more against sin; endeavour to get clearer ideas of the freeness and fulness of the covenant of grace; strive to stir up your languid desires after spiritual blessings; seek for these blessings, not as things desirable merely, but as things indispensable to your happiness; not as things beyond your reach, but as things at­tainable; above all, look less to yourselves, and more to the great Redeemer; and the day-star shall in the end arise in your hearts. “The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds.” “Your peace shall be as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea.”

But have all amongst us a right thus to lay claim to the Saviour’s legacy? Are we all war­ranted to rejoice in our title to this precious gift? There is reason to fear that the greater part of us have no more claim to it, than we have to crowns and sceptres. Before we can have a title to it, we must be united to Christ by a living faith; we must become his people, his children; we must seek our peace in him, and in him alone; a great moral change must take place within us; our affections must be withdrawn from the world and sin, and fixed on holiness and God; we must be born again of the Spirit, and be renewed after the divine image. “There is no peace to the wicked;” the wicked have not only no title to this blessing, but they are altogether incapable of enjoying or receiving it. “Their minds are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest.”

And if God had not made this declaration, our own experience must have led us to a conviction of the same truth. Happiness has been the one great object which we have been seeking ever since we were born; all the energies of our minds, and all the strength of our bodies have been em­ployed in the pursuit of it; and yet we are not happy. We seem to be receding from the object of our labours, rather than drawing nearer to it. It is true that we are sometimes as happy for an hour, as the happiest insect that sports in the summer sun. Our efforts to stifle reflection are successful, and we are enabled to banish from our minds every thought, which, as rational and im­mortal beings, we might be expected to cherish there. But what does this profit us? We are the next hour a prey to disappointment, weari­ness, discontent, and a galling consciousness of our own littleness. In spite of ourselves, the mind will resume its hated work; thoughtfulness will seize upon us; and conscience will make its voice to be heard. The consequence is, that ex­istence becomes an almost intolerable burden. Our hearts ache for relief, and we fly in search of it to those very pursuits of sin and folly, which we are conscious will again leave us to our own wretchedness.

Thus have we gone on from day to day, “seek­ing rest and finding none.” If then we have been strangers to peace in the season of health and prosperity, can we expect to be less unhappy in the day of affliction, and in the hour of sickness and of death? This day and this hour may be much nearer to us than we are aware. We may indeed hardly see how it is possible for affliction or death to touch us. The amusements and business of the world may even have kept every thought of them out of our minds; but neither business nor amusements can always keep sickness out of our houses, or death out of our chambers, or sorrow out of our hearts. There are a thousand unsuspected avenues by which grief can enter the soul. Are we then prepared to receive it as a guest? Is there anything within us, which will almost welcome it into our bosoms, mingle itself with it, and turn it into peace? Are we possessed of anything which can make the hour of tribulation an hour of joy? Infidelity cannot do this. Scepticism never yet soothed one afflicted soul to peace, never lightened it of one sorrowful care, never smoothed the pillow of one dying man. Atheism has indeed been permitted to bestow on some of its most depraved and hardened victims, an awful insensibility; it has enabled a man to trifle like a child even in the prospect of immediate death, and to be as thoughtless on the brink of the grave, as “the brute beasts that have no un­derstanding.” But this insensibility, so far from being a blessing, is one of the heaviest curses that can be drawn down upon a sinner’s head. Such a peace would be well exchanged for the anguish of remorse. It is a death-warrant to the soul, the forerunner of eternal destruction. It is the re­ligion of the cross only, which can quiet the mind without degrading or brutalizing it. It is the gospel only, that can say to the agitated soul, “Peace, be still.”

Turn then, brethren, from the lying vanities of a sceptical and foolish world, and seek with your whole heart the peace of Christ. Seek, at the cross of Jesus, reconciliation with your offended God. Seek an interest in that blood which “cleanseth from all sin.” “Draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith,” to this fountain of blessedness; and you shall at length find rest to your wearied souls. “Having your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience,” a peace shall be poured out on you, “which passeth all understanding;” a peace which none of the cala­mities of life can materially affect; a peace which will keep your souls serene amidst the wreck of a perishing universe; a peace which will endure for ever in the kingdom of your God.