

The Peace That Passes All Understanding

Philippians chapter 4 gives an exhortation for the believers to:

“... let your requests be known unto God. And *the peace of God which passes all understanding* shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

There is then, a peace imparted to man, which proceeds from the Father and which is able to “keep”, or “preserve” the hearts and minds of the believer. But what is that “peace”? And how can we reconcile this passage with the Apostle’s words that “we must through *much tribulation* enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22)? And again, the words of the Psalmist that “many are *the afflictions* of the righteous ...? (Psa. 34:19; cp Jno. 16:33)

When we consider these things, it becomes immediately apparent that there is more to the “peace of God” than simply enjoying a trouble-free life. There is a misconception held by some that once they become followers of Messiah, they will be spared pain and suffering, travail and anguish. That the Lord will not permit these things to come upon them, and their lives will run very smoothly and comfortably until the He comes. However, the real situation is very different; all the holy men of old endured affliction for the sake of the Truth. Some “had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn usunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented ... they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb. 11:36-38).

Having “the peace of God” then, does not mean dwelling in a trouble-free comfort-zone. In this exhortation, we consider some of the aspects of the promised “peace that passeth all understanding”, that we might both discern what it is, and also how it can be cultivated in our lives.

Rather than to be spared tribulation in life, we are specifically promised that if we are the Sons of the Most High, troubles *will* come upon us, for it is written: “Whom the Lord loveth *he chasteneth, and scourgeth* every son whom he receiveth” (Heb.12:6). In love, the Almighty will scourge and chasten each one of His Sons - indeed the absence of such tribulation could well be an indicator that the person in question is not worthy of receiving correction from the Almighty, and has been abandoned to go his/her own way.

NOT AS THE WORLD GIVETH

John chapter 14 records some of the final words of our Master to his disciples, in the days of his mortality:

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you: *not as the world giveth* give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (Jno. 14:27).

Here again, Jesus speaks of the peace which he would granted to the believer – but it is not a peace of the kind that the world can give, which shows it is not merely the “peace and quiet” which some seek. Only Messiah himself can give this peace, that the heart be no longer troubled with the cares and fears of this life.

All around us, we see “peace efforts,” involving quite major wars being carried out with the objective of creating a peaceful global society. So, we think of the invasion of Afganistan, and Iraq particularly – both conflicts begun with the aim to secure long-term peace. In every fibre of the fabric of society, there are cries for men to live in peace with each other, without discrimination of any kind, on gender, age, sexual orientation, religious affiliation – or anything else, so long as it doesn’t infringe upon the ‘rights’ of others, to enjoy their peace. So peace is something which the world seeks for ... yet is something which

is very elusive, and remains beyond its grasp. Yet this is what the world imagines when they talk about peace: cessation of war, safety on the streets, and the ability to live life without interruption in quietness.

WHAT IS TRUE PEACE?

Bible peace, however, is something quite different to this. The Peace that Messiah spoke of will come as a direct consequence not of human endeavours to oppress tyranny, but by Yahweh's righteousness being imposed upon the earth:

“... the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever (Is. 32:17).

Again, the second chapter of Isaiah speak of how nations will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” – but only after Christ “shall judge among the nations and ... rebuke many people”. Only when the Righteous Precepts of the Deity are established among men, will the sea of nations be found as glass, not having any ripple of violence to disturb it (cp Rev. 15:2).

This is something that the natural man does not understand – neither can he, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). Though men strive for peace, they do so upon the basis of the wrong principles. They seek peace upon numerous pieces of legislation which forms the foundation of “human rights”. Nations are governed by fleshly principles influenced and contrived by men of the flesh, whose carnal minds are enmity with God. So, “there is no peace saith Yahweh unto the wicked” (Is. 48:22).

This pattern – of righteousness coming before peace – is repeated many times in Scripture. James tells us that “the wisdom that is from above is *first pure, then peaceable ...*” (Jas. 3:17). Again, Melchisedec is presented as being “by interpretation King of righteousness, and *after that* also the king of Salem, which is, King of peace” (Heb. 7:2). Whatever the “peace that passes all understanding” is then, it must be founded upon the basis of righteousness.

THE BLOOD OF HIS CROSS

We showed earlier how that this Peace can only come from Messiah. Indeed, it is testified of him that “it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and, *having made peace* through the blood of his cross by him to reconcile all things to himself ...” (Col. 1:18). Jesus then, “made peace through the blood of his cross”. In other words, the peace that Christ is able to provide us with is as a direct consequence of his Sacrifice, and our faith in it. Here, we can begin to see what is meant by the term, for elsewhere we find that one of the consequences of the Sacrifice of Christ is the cleansing of mens' conscience:

“How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, *purge your conscience from dead works* to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14).

A man who has faith in the cleansing efficacy of the shed blood of Christ can draw near the throne of Grace boldly, having had his heart sprinkled by the Blood of the Lamb (cp Heb. 10:22). His conscience is purged, or cleansed from sin – and so his mind can be at peace. A man who is spiritually minded has “life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). His mind is so absorbed with the things of the Spirit of God, that he becomes preoccupied with them to the extent that the cares of this life become squeezed out. No longer having a conscience of sin, he is able to be at peace with his Maker. That is true Peace.

The Master himself exhorts us to “seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” and all other things needed to sustain our mortal existence will be provided for us (Mat. 6:33). If we truly seek first the Kingdom, our hearts and our minds will be set on the things which relate to that kingdom, so that no matter how much we suffer in this life, it will all seem to be but a “light affliction” when compared to the

Eternal Weight of Glory which is laid up for us (cp. 2 Cor. 4:17-18). No matter what troubles life brings for the disciple of Christ, there is an inner peace, in the knowledge that his Master is at the door, and that his redemption has been secured. This peace “surpasses (Grk) all understanding”, because it is much more than an intellectual comprehension. It surpasses understanding in every way, for it is founded upon a deeply rooted conviction and faith. Indeed it becomes the primary principle of the believer’s heart, as it is written, “let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (Col. 3:15). For the true believer, their conscience is not defiled, for they know that they strive their best to serve the law of the spirit of life – and know that when their best endeavours fail, through faith in the work of Christ their sins are forgiven. Let us therefore, go forward with renewed vigour, having the peace of God dwelling in our hearts – a peace that will see us through the worst that can happen to us: a peace that will be finally realised in the Kingdom when all of the earth shall be at peace.

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