

MY PEACE I GIVE

John 14:25-31

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“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you” (Jn. 14:27).

Edward Hicks was a nineteenth century American folk painter, and a minister in the Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers. Nearly all of his many paintings were devoted to the same subject: the “Peaceable Kingdom” of Isaiah 11:6 wherein “the wolf will dwell with the lamb..., and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child will lead them.” Hick’s paintings had two goals: to show that Christians could be practicing artists and to express his hope for peace on earth.

Art historians group Hicks’ paintings into four periods. The first period, known as the “Border Peaceable Kingdoms,” for their surrounding borders with the text of Isaiah 11:6, depicted the lions and lambs mingling sweetly, with Quakers enjoying peaceful pursuits in the background. The second phase, the “Banner Peaceable Kingdoms” features banners of Isaiah 11:6 wrapped around the human figures. Now, however, there is disquiet and anxiety, with the people not gathering but dispersing. These paintings reflected a division within the Society of Friends between those who sought a rural lifestyle and those Quakers who lived prosperous city lives. The last two phases, the “Middle” and “Late Peaceable Kingdoms,” reflect Hicks’ abandonment of any hope for peace on earth due to increased division among the Quakers, with the animals fighting and humanity divided. In Hick’s very last painting, his own depression is depicted by a lion hunched over in sheer exhaustion.

What do these art works tell us about Edward Hicks? Seeking peace on earth through the labors of men, he discovered nothing but division and strife, even in a society of religious friends.¹ His quest for peace failed because he looked to men and not to Jesus Christ. What Hicks longed for, Jesus promised to give: “Peace I leave with you,” he said, “my peace I give to you” (Jn. 14:27).

PEACE IN THE STORM

When Jesus told the disciples, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (Jn. 14:27), they were on the brink of a great storm, with much to fear. Jesus was about to lead them out toward the Garden of Gethsemane, where Judas and the temple guards would find them. They therefore needed to be reassured with reasons not to be afraid.

Being a Christian does not preserve us from the storms and trials of this world. Instead, Christ will himself often send us into storms, just as he was now leading the disciples to the place of his arrest. Perhaps the most vivid illustration of this principle was when Jesus sent the disciples onto the wind-swept Sea of Galilee. Mark records that as the storm was about to capsize their little boat, Jesus stepped forward and “rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’” (Mk. 4:39), and the winds and waves obeyed his sovereign voice. This was the same Jesus who now prepared his disciples for the great storm surrounding his arrest and crucifixion. He said to them again, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (Jn. 14:27).

Jesus followed with the reason they should not fear: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (Jn. 14:27). A peaceful state of mind is not something the disciples were to achieve by their own will or devices, but rather Jesus would grant peace as his parting gift. Jesus did not promise to leave his disciples an inheritance of money, worldly influence, or safety. Instead, he gives “inward peace of conscience, arising from a sense of pardoned sin and reconciliation with God.”² Matthew Henry remarks:

¹ Cited from Philip Graham Ryken, *My Father's World* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 117-120.

² J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 3:98.

“When Christ was about to leave the world he made his will. His soul he bequeathed to his Father; his body he bequeathed to Joseph, to be decently interred; his clothes fell to the soldiers; his mother he left to the care of John; but what should he leave to his poor disciples, that had left all for him? Silver and gold He had none; but He left them what was infinitely better, His peace.”³

The peace that Jesus gives may be considered in two ways, in keeping with the biblical language. First, Jesus gives *peace with God*. This is what Paul referred to as the result of our justification through faith: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). Jesus ended the war between the believer and God, paying in his blood the price of peace in the courts of divine justice. Christ’s peace is not merely, however, the absence of our former conflict with God. It also entails the positive experience of the *peace of God*, which results from the ministry of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sends. Paul wrote that we receive this peace when we pray, for then “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). This peace of blessing comes from a right relationship with God, the awareness of his loving presence in our lives, and the receiving of his grace through faith. It was in the *peace of God*, Christ having made *peace with God* on the cross, that the disciples were to be untroubled in the storm.

PEACE DESPITE AN UNLOVING WORLD

When Christians begin speaking of the blessings of spiritual peace, we are sometimes accused of pie-in-the-sky escapism.

But as Jesus promised peace, he did anything but avoid the real threats to the disciples. He dealt with three threats to our peace, including one that would become obvious in the coming hours: the hostility and violence of an unloving world. Jesus said, “my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you” (Jn. 14:27).

James Boice characterized the giving of the world as *insincere*, since the motives seldom match the words; *impotent*, since our peace-making seldom achieves more than a hostile truce; *scanty*, always giving less than was possible; and *selfish*, often giving with a true

³ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 5:903.

desire of receiving in return.⁴ It is large part because of the world's manner of giving that there is no peace. Discovering this reality caused Edward Hicks increasingly to depict strife in his "Peaceable Kingdom" paintings. As the prophet Jeremiah complained about Jerusalem's worldly leaders, "Peace, peace," they say, "when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14).

One of the great eras of worldly peace was the Pax Romana of Augustus Caesar. After his conquests in Western Europe, Augustus returned to Rome and built an altar to peace, the Ara Pacis, which remains today. Fittingly, he placed his peace monument on the field of Mars, the Roman god of war. It was the Roman historian Tacitus who gave the most fitting commentary, citing the words of a Scottish chieftain who had warred against the Roman legions: "they make a desolation, and call it peace."⁵ George Beasley-Murray described Augustus' peace altar as "a monument to the skill of its sculptors and to the empty messianic pretensions of its emperors."⁶

How different is the peace that Christ gives. Jesus did not make peace for himself at the expense of others, but he gives peace to his people at his own expense. His peace altar was not built of marble on the field of war but consisted of two wooden beams in the shape of a cross on Calvary's hill. Whereas the peace of the world is *insincere*, Christ gives peace with the coin of his heart's blood; the world's peace is *impotent*, but Jesus' death for sin achieved true reconciliation with God; the world gives *scantily*, but Jesus gave his very life and body for us; the world gives *selfishly*, but Jesus' peace is one of self-sacrifice and self-giving. "Greater love has no one than this," he explained, "that someone lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13)

Christ's peace differs from the world in terms of its *certainty*. Unlike man who gives but takes back, Paul writes that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). The peace Jesus gives is thus an eternal peace. The peace of Christ contrasts with worldly peace in its *character*: "his peace is not the absence of conditions that intimidate but rather is the composure to be faithful in the face of

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 4:1154.

⁵ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 30.

⁶ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 262.

adversity.”⁷ Finally, the peace of Christ is unique in its *conclusion*. Beasley-Murray writes, “‘My peace’ is Jesus’ bequest of the peace which is no less than the salvation of the kingdom of God.”⁸

PEACE DESPITE CHRIST’S ABSENCE

A second threat to our peace is the problem of Jesus’ departure. Would Christ’s absence remove the disciples’ peace, and does Jesus’ physical absence nullify his peace for us today?

Jesus addressed this problem in a way that may be surprising to us. He said: “You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father” (Jn. 14:28). Knowing the agony that lay ahead of Jesus, we may forget his crowning joy that was just beyond, as the faithful Son of God returned to the heavenly Father in glory! If dying Christians are often excited about seeing God face-to-face for the first time, Christ would have been no less thrilled about, as D. A. Carson put it, “returning to the sphere where he belongs, to the glory he had with the Father before the world began (17:5), and to the place where the Father is undiminished in glory.”⁹

John 14:28 is a favorite verse of Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others who seek to deny Jesus’ true deity, since he states that “the Father is greater than I.” This statement, they assert, specifies that Jesus is something less than fully God. The main problem with this view is that the Gospel of John is filled with direct assertions to Jesus’ full deity, as is the entire New Testament. In John 10:30, for instance, Jesus stated, “I and the Father are one,” claiming deity so clearly that the Jews sought to stone him for blasphemy. John Calvin explains that when Jesus says that the Father is greater, he “is not here drawing a comparison between the divinity of the Father and of Himself, nor between His own human nature and the divine essence of the Father, but rather between His present state and the heavenly glory to which He was shortly to be received.”¹⁰

⁷ Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 444.

⁸ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 262.

⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 508.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *New Testament Commentaries*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 4:90.

An implication of Christ's return to heaven is a second reason why Jesus' absence would be no barrier to his gift of peace. As he insisted throughout this farewell teaching, Jesus' return to the Father would benefit the disciples in every way. Christ's return to the Father, who is "greater", can only mean the beginning of a new era of grace that would exceed all that had previously been known. Christ's return in glory is good news for his followers, since "it will mark the Father's approval and acceptance of all that he has achieved on earth."¹¹

The final reason Christ's absence will not mar the disciples' peace is "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name" (Jn. 14:26). This is the second of four passages in this farewell discourse regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit, each naming him the *Paraklete*, or "Helper." We are reminded here what we observed in our study of John 14:16-17, that the Holy Spirit is a divine person who is sent, not an impersonal power that is seized or manipulated. It is by means of the Spirit's ministry on his behalf that Jesus bequeaths peace to his followers, even in his absence.

In particular, the Holy Spirit will minister peace by means of Christ's revealed Word. Jesus said, "he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn. 14:26). This statement has particular reference to the original disciples, who later as Christ's apostles would write the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Verse 26 explains much regarding this inspiration: the Spirit would teach the apostles the doctrine they would pass on in Scripture and cause them to remember the things Jesus had taught them during his earthly ministry. John is, of course, letting us in on his own experience in writing this Gospel. He has occasionally noted that the disciples did not understand an event or saying of Jesus until after his resurrection (cf. Jn. 2:22; 12:16; 14:26; 15:20). But the Spirit will come and help them, bringing to their minds the whole saving revelation of Jesus for his church.

There are a number of important observations we should make from these verses. First, the Holy Spirit teaches us today nothing but the same message that Jesus gave his disciples. John Calvin emphasized this principle because of his battles with the Roman Catholic Church,

¹¹ Mark Johnson, *Let's Study John* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 196.

which then (as now) claimed special revelation from the Holy Spirit that enabled them to contradict the Bible. Jesus insisted, instead, that the Holy Spirit would convey “all that I have said to you” (Jn. 14:26). Calvin comments, “By this one word we may refute all the inventions which Satan has brought into the Church from the beginning under the pretended authority of the Spirit.... [For] the spirit which introduces any invention foreign to the Gospel is a deceiver and not of Christ; for Christ promises the Spirit who will confirm the teaching of the Gospel, as if He were signing it.”¹² Today, Christians face claims by liberal scholars that the New Testament cannot convey the actual message of Jesus since he did not himself write it. Our answer is the Holy Spirit, who taught the apostles and brought to their remembrance all that Jesus had done and said. We also face extremists within the church who claim special revelation from the Spirit contrary to the Bible. The Spirit, however, teaches nothing but what Christ taught and had recorded in the Scriptures.

Second, we are reminded that our apprehension of God’s Word is a spiritual matter and not a merely intellectual pursuit. We therefore must pray for an understanding of Scripture and we will sometimes wait for the Spirit’s illumination. Likewise, the bare preaching of the gospel accomplishes nothing unless the Spirit would bring the Word of salvation to bear upon the heart, so that we must not only preach and witness God’s Word but also bathe our ministry in prayer.

Third, Jesus’ emphasis on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit indicates that we receive his peace today in large part through the ministry of the Word of God. Just as the Israelites of old ate the entire Passover Lamb, Jesus said that we gain peace from “all that I have said to you” (Jn.14: 26). Jesus’ teaching on sin and forgiveness, on justification, sanctification, and glorification, on life and death, and on the church and the world, is all necessary for our peace. If we are not experiencing the peace that gives, we should seek his peace in prayer (Phil. 4:7) and drink from the fountain of peace that flows through the whole of his Word.

¹² Calvin, *New Testament Commentaries*, 12:88.

PEACE DESPITE SATAN'S ATTACKS

As Jesus prepared to depart from the Upper Room, his mind was focused not only on the unloving world that would soon crucify him and on the disciples whom he loved so well, but he also heard the coming footsteps of his greater adversary, Satan. Indeed, while Jesus was delivering this very teaching, the devil was busily working through Judas the betrayer, the scheming Jewish leaders, and the temple soldiers who were then arming for their appointment with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. Thus Jesus mentioned one last threat to the disciples' peace: "I will no longer talk much with you," he said, "for the ruler of this world is coming" (Jn. 14:30).

Satan is called the "ruler of this world" not because he wrested actual dominion from the hands of God, but because "by God's permission he exercises his tyranny in the world."¹³ This is the same Devil who asked to "sift" Peter that very evening, resulting in his three denials (Lk. 22:31), and whom Peter would later describe as "a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). So why would Satan's attacks not threaten the peace of Christ's people? Jesus answered, "He has no claim on me" (Jn. 14:30).

Long beforehand, Satan had come in serpent form to tempt our first parents into sin and ruin. In the first Garden, the Devil had found Adam and Eve apt to his influence. But how different it would be when Satan came to the garden in which Jesus presented himself to be arrested and put to death. With Jesus, the new Adam and the fountain of a new, Spirit-empowered humanity, Satan could gain no handhold. Satan could find no chink in the armor of the Son of God, no flaw to exploit, no weakness to tempt, and especially no sin to condemn. This can only be said about Jesus Christ, which is why he alone could offer himself for the sin of others and why we need him to redeem us from the power of sin and of Satan.

C. S. Lewis captured Satan's inability to master Jesus in his famous novel *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In that tale, the evil White Witch knows the way in which she can gain the right to slay the Lion King, Aslan. With what lurid evil she delights in every

¹³ Ibid., 4:91.

moment of his agony and disgrace. His death was the great triumph for which her heart had long lusted. But the deeper mystery which she has never fathomed was that he would by his death overthrow her kingdom utterly.¹⁴ So it was with the true subject of Lewis' allegory, the Lord Jesus Christ in his atoning death, by which he conquered sin, overthrew the power of death, and laid Satan's kingdom in ruins. The writer of Hebrews explains: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Heb. 2:14-15).

Instead of being conquered by the Devil, Jesus went to the cross of his own choosing, in obedience to the Father's will for our salvation. He said, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (Jn. 14:31). As Jesus now prepared to depart the Upper Room and head to that garden confrontation, he wanted people to know not merely how much he loves them but, even more importantly, how much he loves the Father. Jesus was not tricked or overpowered in his murder but sovereign in his obedience to the will of God for our salvation. Hearing already the footsteps of Satan, Jesus lifted up his head, rejoicing to obey his Father and knowing that Satan's attacks could not thwart the peace that he gives, and declared, "He has no claim on me" (Jn. 14:30).

PEACE THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

With this teaching, Jesus concluded his discourse to the disciples in the Upper Room, urging them, "Rise, let us go from here" (Jn. 14:31). On the way to the Mount of Olives, Jesus would teach them more things, yet this promise of peace was central to his overall message. Jesus stated the reason: "Now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe" (Jn.14:29). What ultimately matters is that his followers believe, since the peace Christ gives can only be received through saving faith.

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York: Collins, 2000).

Jesus, with the whole New Testament, was clear in stating that his shed blood would savingly benefit only those who believe on him, not the entire world. Indeed, the Gospel of John has throughout emphasized the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation (cf. Jn. 20:31). John summarized Jesus' gospel offer, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (Jn. 3:36). This means that we gain peace *with God* only by confessing our need for Christ to pay the penalty of our sin, finding our forgiveness in his shed blood.

The progressive despair of Edward Hicks' "Peaceable Kingdom" paintings indicates that he never turned to Jesus and thus never found the peace that he desired. But he must at some time have been told about Christ and his peace. I say this because in one early painting, Hicks depicts a child holding a branch with a cluster of grapes. That is a reference to Christ, the grapes pointing to the blood he would shed on the cross. In this painting alone, among all of Hick's art work, the banner of peace flows from Christ, who he depicts on high before all the world.¹⁵ That painting is true, since the banner of peace comes only from the cross of Christ, who says now, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn. 14:27). If you confess your need of his atonement for your sins and trust him for forgiveness and salvation, he will grant you peace with God. Then, as you live by faith through prayer and God's Word, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).

Lastly, we should notice that because of the peace that he gives, not only was Jesus able to face the hatred of an unloving world and the assaults of the devil, but he also called his disciples to join him. "Rise, let us go from here," he called, summoning them to go with him on his way to the cross. Likewise today, Christ gives us peace so that we may rise and go to the world, unfazed by its scorn and undaunted by Satan's opposition, so that others might know the glory of God, who is great above all, believe in the gospel of Christ, and receive through faith his matchless gift of peace.

¹⁵ Cited from Ryken, *My Father's World*, 120.