Luke 19:38 (P. Compain) 72046

Bible Treasury: Volume N10, Peace on Earth - Peace in Heaven (19:38)

“Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken.” These words of Isaiah may be applied to the magnificent song of Luke 2:14. Let us hear the song, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” This is a song of gladness, uttered, under the direction of the angel, by a multitude of the heavenly host. It sounds sweet in the ear of God and in the whole realm of heaven, whether the earth responds to it or not. It is the divine announcement of the birth of the “Man-child” —a Savior for men. Alas, that there were so few voices down here to join the heavenly chorus, and those few voices tuned only eight days after the birth of the child; but when tuned, speaking the language of heaven in the grand words of Luke 2:29-32!

The words of the angelic song, “On earth pace, good will toward men,” express the mind of God, and attest the dispositions of His heart. The living proof of it was in the new-born Child, His own Son (Luke 1:32). A greater, fuller proof could not be given. There was the Word made flesh, made of a woman to be a Savior, not a Savior for angels, but for lost and sinful man “Good will toward men.” And “peace” —Micah had said, “This Man shall be the peace"; and “Prince of peace” is one (and not the least) of the wonderful titles given Him in Isa. 9:6. “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.”

But man was not of one mind with God. Is there in his history a single instance where he is so minded? He would have none of the peace brought by the Son, and showed no good will toward God. Peace he wants, peace he longs for, but only such a peace as may be brought about by his own means, his progress, his civilization, etc. We know what his most honest and strenuous efforts end in. He therein labors for the wind, because he will have peace apart from and independent of Him of whom it is written, “This man shall be the peace” —He and none other.

Social peace and enjoyment He would have given abundantly to men, both Jews and Gentiles. The former would have known the blessing of Zechariah's word, “In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree": and the latter would have heeded the word addressed to them, “Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people.” But they would not have it. Rather did they unite to plot against Him who would have been their Benefactor. It was all out of jealousy, as we see in Psa. 2, and of hatred too. Perfect goodness was there, and they looked upon it with an evil eye. Spite of the ill feeling so common between them, in this they were all of one accord. Against Him did Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, gather together, determined to do away with Him. There was unanimity; rulers and people were of the same mind. From that moment peace on earth was gone; and it will not come back until they recognize the rights of the Prince of peace so wantonly rejected by them.

That the most sincere and hearty endeavors will never avail to establish peace among men, we have the lamentable proof before our eyes. What a cruel mockery is the saying, If you will have peace, prepare for war. A far truer one would be, 'If you would have peace, beat your swords into plowshares, and your spears into pruning-hooks.' Preparation for war must sooner or later end in war. And the war will be all the more terrible as the preparation shall have been more complete. Much as this is to be deplored, it is unavoidable. How long will this state of things last? As long as God permits fallen and rebellious man to govern this world, for he is branded with this awful character, “their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways.” There will be even worse days than the present, bad enough as they are, and ominous enough too as a prelude.

Yet there is, through God's infinite compassion, a way and means to obtain peace, spite of the restlessness of man and his dark counsels. It has pleased God to put such means in the hands of Christians, however unconscious in many a case they may be of it? And what is that? Intercession! Not that they can dictate either to man or to God, but with God they can and should plead, as He Himself exhorts us to do in 1 Tim. 2:1-4. The ministry of intercession is a wondrous one, too little availed of. Just think of God calling upon His children to uphold the peace of the world—a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty being good and acceptable in his sight. When it is a question of the defense and protection of Israel, His earthly people, He takes the lead in their armies, destroying their enemies either by his own hand and without them, or by giving them irresistible power. With Christians, His heavenly people, He is the “God of peace,” not taking sides, as it were, with one or the other lighting party, although controlling all and making all to serve His purpose. “The God of peace.” He enjoins His people that they should lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting, in prayer to Him. And not only in prayer for social and temporal welfare, legitimate and proper as this may be in its sphere, but in behalf of human souls, Christians knowing that soul-salvation, as Peter terms it (1 Pet. 1:9), is far above all the concerns of the present life in importance. They heed the words, “God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

But what is the best time for the exercise of this ministry of intercession? Verse 1 of 1 Tim. shows that it ought to be habitual, constant, “first of all” —so prone are men to disturb the peace. Now we can say with deep humiliation that this is not ordinarily the case. When things down here go on smoothly, we but too easily lose the consciousness of their frailty and changeableness, and we relax in prayer until calamity breaks upon us. Then we wake up and enter on our service of intercession. This is right, to be sure, but it leaves an uneasy sense of being somewhat late. Intercession is to be blended with supplication and prayer and thanksgiving. Thanksgiving expresses the value that Christians are to attach to a quiet and peaceable life, which is not a matter of course in a world so readily disturbed by storms. But if we enter on prayer only after the storm has broken out, the intercession, supplication and prayer may go up to God (fervently offered and not unheard), but what of thanksgiving?

PEACE IN HEAVEN

But independent, and even in spite of man, our blessed Lord would not return to heaven without making a peace of a far higher order then the peace on earth among men—a peace made not, between man and Mall, but between God and man. This He made by the blood of His cross. On that cross “He was set forth a propitiation through faith in His blood to declare God's righteousness for the remission of sins.... that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Sin has not been winked at. God would have it to be blotted out. Sin winked at might have suited man, but it could never suit a holy God. Blotted out it must be absolutely, completely, and what could do that? What could wash a poor, sinful creature—whether man or woman—and make white as snow in the sight of God? Only the blood of Christ. Sprinkled seven times on the mercy-seat, it met the eye of God and spoke peace, perfect peace, as the number “seven” implies. Hence He could say, “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” What He ever remembers is, that His blessed Son has once suffered for them, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. Salvation is by grace, or else who could obtain it?

But it is by grace founded on righteousness. In the gospel of the present day this is much forgotten: God's love, God's goodness, God's pity are freely proclaimed, as surely they are great realities, but they could not possibly have free course at the expense of His righteousness. Take this out of the gospel, and the gospel will be all falsified. God must be satisfied in all His claims before He can satisfy us, but satisfied He has fully been in the propitiation made by the blood of His Son, and He has distinctly declared it in that He has raised His Son from the dead and given Him glory. From His Son He claims no more, and all He claims from the convicted and repentant sinner is, that he should believe that His Son has been “delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification.” Thus, and thus only, are we, or could we be, justified on the ground of faith; and the immediate consequence of being justified after this manner and principle is that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Such peace, to the making of which we have in nowise contributed, cannot be shaken either by men or demons. It was made in the face of, and in Spite of, all their rage, at the cross. But it leaves this world condemned, unjustified and unjustifiable. Unbelief necessarily excludes one from all the benefits of redemption. Without faith a man remains, as he is in nature through sin, alienated from the life of God. What sort of peace can he be entitled to, since peace with God is the consequence of justification, and justification is on the ground of faith? No soul can be made happy and at rest for time and eternity, apart froth the saving knowledge of Christ as set forth by God to be a mercy-seat. His work alone, not my works either good or bad, enables me to stand before God without fear. In my self-righteousness and pride I keep away from God; in my faith I draw near and say, ‘All my boast is in Christ and His propitiation.' And in saving and justifying me on that ground God puts honor on the work of His Son and declares peace to be made forever.

Now this heavenly peace is what the disciples proclaim in Luke 19:38. Not that they apprehended the beating of their words. We know distinctly from John 12:16 that at the first “they did not understand these things; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they these things, and that they had done these things unto Him.” They understood not, yet they spoke out the mind of God, led by the Spirit. With the scripture in Zech. 9:9 they were familiar; but what they did not foresee nor expect was that in His first coming the King would be rejected, and, on His rejection as King, would go to the cross and there make a peace wholly connected with heaven. Yet was not this the truth? The kingdom was to be postponed, not lost, and when established in a day that is fast coming, then will the song be loudly raised, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Until then it is not “peace on earth,” but “peace in heaven,” whence the blessed Lord now fills with it believing souls, but excludes them from the unbelieving world.

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