

2 Timothy 3, Jeremiah 29 & John 14

The Word of God, the Thoughts of Peace, and the Peace of Christ

Scripture Readings

“In the last days perilous times shall come... having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” — 2 Timothy 3:1–5

“Every scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” — 2 Timothy 3:16

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith Jehovah — thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you in your latter end a hope.” — Jeremiah 29:11

“He shall be a priest upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” — Zechariah 6:13

“I leave peace with you; I give my peace to you.” — John 14:27

Three Safeguards in Perilous Times

An article came recently tracing how the departure from the Word of God in the 1920s — beginning with the famous Scopes Trial — has led step by step to the moral confusion and rejection of Christianity we see around us today. The argument is compelling: when the foundation is weakened, everything built upon it is eventually compromised. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are the foundation of all that follows in Scripture. When questions arose in that courtroom about Cain’s wife, or the age of the earth, or the literal days of

creation, the representative of Christianity did not fully resist. He conceded ground. And from that point the educational system, and eventually the broader culture, moved steadily away from the Word of God.

In 2 Timothy 3, there are three things that secure the saints in the last days. In verse 10, Paul points to his own doctrine — the body of truth given through the apostle, including our heavenly position, the truth of the one body of Christ, and the many precious things that ground us. In verse 12 he points to the person of Christ — holding fast to His glory and the honour due to Him as the eternal Son of God. And in verses 14 to 17, he points to the Scriptures themselves. These are not three equal safeguards; the person of Christ is most important. But the Word of God is what both reveals Him and preserves our sense of Him.

There was a thought that came through the words of a sister in the meeting: she described the Word of God as that which sustained her through the bumps in the road — the trials and sorrows of life. Then there was the image of a military funeral, and the careful folding of the flag. It took some ten minutes. When it was done, each of the two soldiers present held it to their heart in turn. Do we value the Word of God as much as they valued that flag? We ought to — more. The condition of things around us, and in the church as a whole, is a direct consequence of not valuing it enough.

Israel in Babylon: Jeremiah 29

Jeremiah 29 is one of the great passages of pastoral comfort in the Old Testament. The people of God had been carried captive to Babylon — a wicked city that had been corrupt from the days of the Tower of Babel, where men first set themselves to rise into the heavens and make a name for themselves. And yet we ought not to suppose that all who were carried there were faithless. We know from the book of Daniel that there were those in that captivity who would not defile themselves with the king's meat, even at the cost of their lives. As Elijah

was told that seven thousand had not bowed the knee to Baal, so there were faithful ones among the captives in Babylon.

To them Jeremiah sent a letter, and the word of it was: settle in. Build houses. Plant gardens. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands. This is going to be a while. It will be seventy years. But then the Lord says what He wants them to carry through all of it: “I know the thoughts that I think toward you — thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you in your latter end a hope.”

The question that arose from all of this was a personal one: if I am not in communion with the Lord, how would I know what His thoughts are? How would I know that these things are “just bumps in the road”? I could only know it through communion. The Lord in His grace communicated with His people Israel through the prophets — and through Jeremiah’s letter, and through what was revealed to Daniel in Babylon, the faithful ones were able to look at their captivity and see within it the purposes of a God whose thoughts were thoughts of peace toward them.

We have the indwelling Holy Spirit. We have the completed Word of God. We do not need a letter sent from a distant servant. The thought is already here. But it requires communion to enter into it.

The Counsel of Peace: Zechariah 6

Zechariah 6:12–13 speaks prophetically of the Messiah, who will build the temple of Jehovah and be a priest upon His throne. And it adds something remarkable about the relationship between the Messiah and Jehovah: “the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” This is more than a declaration. Jehovah had already told His captive people, “My thoughts toward you are thoughts of peace.” That is a declaration — a wonderful thing to know. But what Zechariah adds is that there is counsel. There is communication. There is a mutual engagement in this matter of peace between Christ and the Father.

We must be careful with our human terms. The persons of the Godhead are omniscient — the Father knows everything the Son knows, and the Son knows everything the Father knows. There is no information one must pass to another. Yet the Scripture does not present God as an automaton who simply points and things happen. These things are a concern in the Godhead, and they are spoken of in terms that human beings can enter into, however imperfectly. In Isaiah the Lord says, “Who will go for us?” — that is counsel. In Zechariah, the Messiah reigning as priest upon His throne has a counsel of peace with Jehovah on behalf of His earthly people. The determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God — what a phrase that is. Not that God merely foresaw what would happen and planned around it, but that He predetermined it and it stands.

He did not reveal all of this to His people in Jeremiah’s day. He simply said, “You know Me — I am Jehovah. My thoughts toward you are thoughts of peace.” That was enough. But we, on this side of the cross, know more. We know the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We know the Saviour. We know that the counsel of peace which the prophets saw dimly is now fully enacted and accomplished in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Two Aspects of Peace: John 14

John 14 contains one of the most beloved promises in the New Testament: “In my Father’s house are many abodes... I go to prepare you a place... I am coming again and shall receive you to myself.” This is the Lord speaking to His own, still on this side of the cross, telling them that captivity in this world will not last. There is happiness coming. And what He does not explain to them — not yet — is that the preparation of that place was accomplished not by His going to heaven to do some building work, but by His death, burial, resurrection and ascension. The moment He entered into glory the place was prepared. The work was entirely finished.

And then verse 27: “I leave peace with you; I give my peace to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it fear.” There are two distinct things here — this is not merely poetic repetition.

“I leave peace with you” — this is the peace of the cross. The Lord was about to go to Calvary and accomplish that which makes peace. This is the peace that the lost do not have — the peace that comes from knowing that our sins are forgiven, that death has been conquered, that death is now our servant to bring us home to be with the Lord. That was the peace that a dying brother had in his final months — a peace that the doctors and the circumstances could not disturb. The doctors made plain that he was going to die, and he said simply: “I have peace about dying. I know I am going to be with the Saviour.” That is the peace of the cross.

“I give my peace to you” — this is something different. The Lord was not a sinner. He had no need of the peace of the cross for Himself. Death had no reign over Him; He entered into it as an act of deliberate obedience to the Father and gave up His spirit of His own will. What peace did He have? John says of Him that He was “the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father” — and he says this of the Lord as a man, here on earth. That place of communion and nearness to the Father was never disrupted by the incarnation. Through every storm, every opposition, every attempt on His life, the Lord had serene peace. He was asleep in the stern of the boat while the seasoned fishermen were in terror. Not because He was indifferent, but because His communion with the Father was unbroken. He knew exactly what lay before Him — and He was at peace.

This second peace is not the automatic possession of every believer. It is the peace of one who walks in communion with God. Abraham had it — when the Lord tested him with Isaac, we read nothing of Abraham lying awake in anguish, turning the matter over and over in his mind. He rose early and got on with it. The two on the road to Emmaus did not have it — they thought everything had gone wrong. We may be in circumstances where we too feel that everything has

gone wrong. But in God's eyes nothing has gone wrong. Everything is proceeding exactly according to His determinate counsel and foreknowledge. The Apostle Paul had that peace — stoned and left for dead, he rose and went back into the very city that had tried to kill him, because he had a clear sense that the Lord meant all of it for good and was there with him in it.

May the Lord help us to distinguish between the disturbance of a bad conscience — which is needful and must be heeded — and the difficulties of life that are not of our own making. For the latter, the answer is not anxious calculation but communion. And in communion we find both the peace He has left with us through the cross, and the peace He gives us from His own life — the deep, settled peace of one who knows that the Father's thoughts are thoughts of peace, and that the counsel of peace stands forever.

“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it fear.” — John 14:27