

The Peace of Christ, the Upper Springs, and the Athenians

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Simon, Simon — Satan's Sifting and the High Priestly Prayer

Luke 22:24 records a strife breaking out among the disciples about which of them should be considered the greatest — this immediately after the Lord had warned that one of them would betray Him. The Lord turns to Simon Peter with His name twice — Simon, Simon — and says: behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.

The Lord's intercession is never-failing. The image used throughout Scripture is of hands uplifted — but where Moses had to have his hands held up by others, the Lord's hands are always uplifted for us. He ever lives to make intercession. And what He prays for is not that the circumstances be easy, but that the faith fail not. Faith was a gift — given by the grace of God, not earned or inherent in ourselves. And the one who gave it maintains it. Peter failed in circumstance; but his faith was restored, and to him were committed the keys of the kingdom.

Caleb's Daughter and the Upper Springs

Joshua 15 records Caleb's daughter Achsah dismounting from her donkey and asking her father for a blessing. He had already given her a south land; she asked for springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. The upper springs have been likened to the first three chapters of Ephesians — the highest truth, the heavenly places, everything God has lavished on us in Christ. The lower springs correspond to the last three chapters — the practical

walk, the conduct that flows from the position. Both are given together. Both are necessary.

Caleb was a man of faith — forty years in the wilderness with a rebellious people, knowing by faith that the land was theirs, and then at eighty-five years old going up to take Hebron, the place where the sons of Anak lived. His faith was sustained across that entire wilderness period. And his daughter, clearly a woman of the same character, asks not merely for a south land but for more — springs. We are not to be satisfied with a little corner of the inheritance, or with the south land only. There is a desire that springs from faith to enter more fully into what God has given.

Every Spiritual Blessing in Heavenly Places — Ephesians 1

Ephesians 1:3–14 unfolds those upper springs. It opens: blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. Everything. Not some blessings as a start, with more to be earned. Every spiritual blessing, already given, already ours, in the heavenly places, and in Christ — so that none of it can be lost, since Christ cannot be taken from us.

What flows from that? He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. Before the world was made, before we existed, we were in the mind of God — chosen in Christ. Not because He saw something good in us, but according to the good pleasure of His will. Then grace: unearned, unmerited, freely given from Himself. Then adoption as sons — not merely children, but sons, brought into the same relationship to the Father that the Lord Jesus has. Christ's place is our place. Then redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. Then the mystery of His will — the gathering together of all things in Christ in the fullness of times. Every verse adds something. The first three chapters of Ephesians are among the deepest things in all of Scripture —

the cluster of grapes too heavy for one man to carry, requiring a pole and two men between them.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath
blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. —
Ephesians 1:3*

I Leave Peace — I Give My Peace — Two Different Things

John 14:27 contains a distinction that rewards attention: I leave peace with you — I give my peace unto you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it fear. Two kinds of peace are in view. I leave peace with you is the peace that comes from His work — peace with God, the peace made by the blood of the cross, the peace of knowing sins forgiven and standing before God accepted. That is what He leaves as a legacy of His finished work.

I give my peace is different. The Lord Jesus did not need peace with God — He was always in perfect relationship with the Father. His peace was the peace of complete submission and communion with the Father in every circumstance. No external pressure could disturb it. When He was weary, hungry, rejected, surrounded by those who misunderstood Him, opposed by those who hated Him, facing the cross — through all of it His peace was undisturbed, because His will was entirely the Father's will and He dwelt in unbroken communion with Him. That is the peace He gives to us. And we can lack it — not because He has not given it, but because we are not in the same state of submission and communion that He was.

The Athenians — Spending All Day Telling and Hearing the News

Acts 17:21 describes the Athenians and the strangers sojourning with them as spending their time in nothing else than to tell and to hear the news. There is

something to observe here. Paul came to a city saturated with information — all sorts of ideas, all sorts of philosophies, the intellectual capital of the ancient world — and they knew nothing of God. The abundance of information had not produced knowledge of Him. It had produced the opposite: distraction, constant novelty-seeking, and no time to think about anything permanent.

The line from ancient Athens to the present is shorter than it might appear. There were three television channels in living memory. Then cable news, then twenty-four-hour news, then headline news, then breaking news. And now there is not really news at all in most of what competes for attention — it is simply a constant stream of what everyone is doing, thinking, eating, and feeling, available at all times in a pocket. The Athenians spent all day telling and hearing the news. We have refined the system considerably. And the effect is the same: no time, no quiet, no space to think about the cluster of grapes from Ephesus 1, to meditate on what God has given us in Christ, to develop the kind of understanding that gives real peace.

The peace of God is connected directly in Philippians 4 to what occupies the mind: whatsoever things are true, noble, just, pure, amiable, of good report — think on these things. That is not a description of the social media feed. The God of peace shall be with you follows from that occupation. The God who dwells in imperturbable peace — whose purposes move inexorably forward regardless of all that opposes them — is with those whose minds are occupied with what is His. And being with Him means that the peace He dwells in begins to be the peace we dwell in.

Occupy Thyself With These Things — Be Holy in Them

First Timothy 4:13–15 gives the aged apostle's practical instruction to a young man: till I come, give thyself to reading, to exhortation, to teaching. Neglect not the gift that is in thee. Occupy thyself with these things. Be holy in them — that

is, wholly in them — that thy progress may be manifest to all.

Wholly in them. Not as a spare-time interest, not as a background activity while the screen scrolls on. The occupation that produces peace and builds the understanding of God's purposes requires a quality of attention that constant notification and stimulation makes very difficult. It is not that reading and meditation are inherently hard. It is that the system that surrounds us is designed to make them feel like hard work, while what is effortless is the constant consumption of what the Athenians spent their day on.

The person who has spent years in the Word will not feel intimidated by a deep question from the Scriptures. They will be drawn in by it, delighted by it. The one who feels intimidated by it is simply receiving information that they have not yet spent enough time in the Word — not a condemnation but an invitation. Begin somewhere. If Ephesians 1 is too deep at first, begin with the more practical chapters and let the Lord lead you in. The upper springs and the lower springs are both there. Aksa received both. And the God who gave His Son for us, who chose us before the foundation of the world, who made His peace available to us on the cross and promises to give us His own peace besides — that God has no intention of withholding from any of His children the springs of water they ask for.