

PEACE—HOW GAINED, HOW BROKEN

NO. 2112

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for He will speak peace unto His people and to His saints: but let them not turn again to folly.”
Psalm 85:8.*

“I WILL hear what God the Lord will speak.” There were voices and voices. There were voices of the past concerning God’s wondrous mercy to His people—“You have been favorable unto Your land; You have brought back the captivity of Jacob.” But mingled with these were the sad voices of the present. He heard the wailing and the pleading of those who said, “Will You be angry with us forever? Will You draw out Your anger to all generations?” From this mingling of singing and sighing, the Psalmist turned away and cried, “I will hear what God the Lord will speak. I will get me into the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High. I will hear that voice from between the cherubim which speaks peace to the soul.”

Beloved, herein is wisdom. Resort to the sanctuary of God. When you cannot find harmony in the voices of the street, or the voices of the Church, turn to the melody of that one voice which “will speak peace unto His people.”

Again, the Psalmist had been praying. At the Mercy Seat he had spread out this petition, “Will You not revive us again: that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us Your mercy, O Lord and grant us Your salvation.” When he had spoken, he desired an answer. He watched and waited till the Lord God should give him a reply. A friend, kindly wishing to spare me, puts at the end of his letter, “No answer expected.” This is too often a footnote to men’s prayers.

David did not pray in that fashion—he expected an answer from the mouth of the Lord. He said within himself, “I have spoken—but now I will speak no more but hear what God the Lord will speak.” Always follow up prayer with holy *expectancy*. Prayers which expect no answer are guilty of taking the name of God in vain. They are a misuse of the holy ordinance of supplication. And they are a question put upon the Divine existence, inasmuch as they reduce the Godhead to an idol, like to those images of the heathen which have ears but they hear not, neither do they speak.

Prayers without faith are an insult to the attributes of God and dishonor to His sacred name. If you pray aright, in the name of Jesus, expect the Lord to hear you, even as you would hear your child, if he asked bread of you.

In addition to this, it should be the daily resolve of every Christian man—“I will hear what God the Lord will speak.” Not only when I am dazed and confused with other voices. Nor only when I have expressed my heart in prayer—but at all times and seasons—I will hear what God the Lord shall speak. There are many doctrines and controversies. But “I will hear what God the Lord will speak.” His voice, by His Prophets and Apostles, shall be the umpire of every dispute with me. I will also turn to the Word of God for the rule of my daily life, as well as for the instruction of my mind in doctrine. I will have regard to the precepts as well as to the promises. “Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

When I would know my duty, “I will hear what God the Lord will speak.” And, hearing His Word of command, I will need neither whip nor spur, but will make haste in the way of His commands. I will listen to His Word, whatever I may do with the precepts of men. Has He spoken? Did the primeval darkness hear it? Shall not the light which He has given me be attentive to it? Even the dead shall hear that voice and they that hear shall live. Shall not I, who have been quickened by His Spirit, joyfully say, “I will never forget Your precepts: for with them You have quickened me”?

Our Savior speaks of some who enter into life halt and maimed and having one eye. But He does not speak of anybody entering into life without ears. We must *hear* the voice of God, for it is written, “Hear and your soul shall live.” Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. By Ear Gate the Prince Emmanuel enters the town of Mansoul. Men are saved, not by what they touch, or see, or taste, or smell—but by what they hear. Oh, that we would all hear the voice of Christ with solemn attention!

Our Lord says, “He that has ears to hear, let him hear.” Be this our resolve—“I will hear what God the Lord will speak.” Like young Samuel, let each one say, “Speak, Lord. For Your servant hears.”

There is one special reason given by the Psalmist why the people of God should be most willing and eager to hear what God the Lord shall speak, and that is because, “He will speak peace unto His people and to His saints.” You, Beloved, will hear nothing from the Lord but that which will calm your fears and cheer your hearts. The Lord speaks no thunders against you. His tones are tenderness, His Words are mercy, His Spirit is love, His message is peace. I will hear what God the Lord will speak—for He will speak peace and nothing else but peace, unto His own people. That is the subject for us to consider this morning. The Lord Jehovah gives peace to His holy ones.

First, what we know the Lord will speak. And, secondly, what we fear may hinder our enjoying the blessing which He speaks to us—“Let them not turn again to folly”—a notable word of warning, to which we shall do well to give heed.

I. First, let us consider WHAT WE KNOW THE LORD WILL SPEAK. “I will hear what God the Lord will speak. For He will speak peace.”

The first point is, He speaks peace to a certain company—“to His people, and to His saints.” Let us, then, ask ourselves, Has the Lord ever spoken peace to us, or will He do so? He will certainly do so if we have an ear to hear His voice. For God will not speak sweet words to those who turn to Him a deaf ear. He that will not hear the Gospel of peace, shall never know the peace of the Gospel. If you will not hear the Holy Spirit when He warns you of your sins, neither shall you hear Him revealing peace through pardon.

If you will not hear the Lord when He proposes to you reconciliation through the sacrifice of His dear Son. If you will not hear Him when He bids you repent and believe and be washed in the blood of the Lamb, then He will never speak peace to your soul. There is no peace out of Christ, who is our Peace. There is one Ambassador and one Mediator and only one. There is one atonement by blood and only one.

There is one Covenant of peace and there can never be another. Reconciliation comes to men by Jesus Christ and by no other gate. If you will not hear the Lord when He speaks concerning His dear Son, who is the Propitiation for sins, He will never speak peace to your heart. Oh, for the ear which is opened to hear the Lord, for this is the sure mark of Divine Grace! Does not Jesus say, “My sheep hear My voice”?

Those to whom the Lord speaks peace are His people and they acknowledge Him to be their God. Many men have no God. They would not like to be called atheists but it practically comes to that. God is not in their thoughts, their plans, their actions, their business, their life. But there is peace to that man to whom God is the greatest fact of his existence. Happy is he who has God first and last and midst in all that he does. Look him through and through and you will perceive that as the color tinges the stained glass, so does faith in God color all his life.

God is with him in his loneliness and among the multitude—God is above him to govern him, beneath him to uphold him—within him to quicken him. The man has a God to worship, a God to trust, a God to delight in. If God is everything to you, you are among His people and He will speak peace unto you. That peace is, however, always connected with *holiness*, for it is added, “and to His *saints*.” His people and His saints are the same persons. Those who have a God know Him to be a holy God, and therefore they strive to be holy themselves. He that has no saintship about him will have no peace about him.

If you live a blundering, careless, godless life, you will have much tossing to and fro and many questionings of heart. “There is no peace,” says my God, “unto the wicked.” But to His people, His saintly ones, His sanctified ones, the people who follow after righteousness—to these the Lord Himself will secure peace by His own word of mouth.

Do I hear anyone saying, “Alas, I could not venture to be classed with saints”? Listen one minute—these people, though they are now God’s people, and though they are now made saintly by His Grace—were once given over to folly. How do I know this? Because the text says, “Let them not turn *again* to folly”—which shows that once they did follow after folly. Once they followed sin with all their hearts. They knew not God, neither served Him. But they have been turned away from folly, sin and shame—a change, a conversion has taken place in them, by the Grace of God.

Therefore, dear Hearer, let not your past foolishness dismay you, if you would now come to God. Fool as you may have been, the Lord is turning you from folly. And if He brings you to be numbered among His people and His holy ones, He will speak peace to you. I think I hear one say, “I have turned away from folly but I feel that there is in my heart a

tendency to return to it!" I know it. I, too, have felt the old Adam pulling at my sleeve, to draw me back to the old way, if possible.

So it was with these people, or else the Lord would not have needed to say, "Let them not turn again to folly." They were His people, they were His saints, too—and He spoke peace to them. But the old nature lurked within, and made the heart in danger of turning again to folly. If you find the old leaven working within you, fermenting unto evil and making you feel sick at heart to think that you should be so base, then bow low at your Savior's feet and cry to Him in the language of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Yet remember, even if it is so with you, nevertheless you may be numbered with the Lord's people, of whom He has said that He will speak peace unto them. But if you have no horror of sin. If you have no conflict with evil. If you have no longing for righteousness and no ear for the voice of the Lord, then God will not speak peace to you. But one of these days He will speak thunderbolts and accent His words with flames of fire—and this shall be the tenor of His speech—"Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." May you never hear that voice of wrath. But may peace be spoken into your soul.

But now, dear Friends, I notice here that the peace which is to be desired is peace which God speaks—and all other peace is evil. The question is sometimes put—"We see bad men enjoy peace and we see good men who have but little peace." That is one of the mysteries of life. But it is not a very difficult one as to its first part. Why do bad men enjoy a kind of peace? I answer—sometimes their peace arises from sheer carelessness. They will not think, reflect, or consider. They do not intend to look about them, or before them. For "they count it one of the wisest things to drive dull care away."

They go through the world like blind men. They are on the verge of a precipice and they do not know their danger, or wish to know it. They will go over the edge of the cliff and be broken to pieces. But they have hardened their necks and if you warn them, they will hate you for it. These are your men that fill high the bowl and chase the flying hours with glowing feet. They live right merrily. Like the men of the old world, they marry and are given in marriage, they drink and are drunken—till the flood comes and there is no escape.

Many are quiet in conscience because of worldliness. They are too much occupied to give fair attention to the affairs of their souls. They are taken up with business. They are at it from morning to night—shutters up and shutters down. They can find time for nothing but counting their money, or shifting their stock. Adam was lost in the garden of Eden. But these men are lost in their shops, lost in their warehouses, lost in their ships, lost in their farms, lost in the market. They give no thought to the world to come, because *this* world engrosses them. From this kind of peace may we be delivered!

Some have a brawny conscience—I mean a conscience hard, callous, rough—you cannot make it feel. A healthy conscience is tender as a raw wound, which fears a touch. But some men's consciences are covered with a thick skin and are devoid of feeling. Certain sinners have a conscience seared as with a hot iron and this brings with it that horrible peace which is the preface of eternal damnation.

Around us are persons who have a peace which Satan preserves. "When a strong man armed keeps his house, his goods are in peace." When Satan is in full possession of a man, then no disturbing thoughts come in, and the sinful heart is well content. "They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." They may even die at peace, for the Psalmist complains, "there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm." Satan has filled them with "a strong delusion to believe a lie," and so in peace they perish. They go willingly to destruction, like sheep to the slaughter.

And some have a peace of sullenness—an awful peace of despair, in which the man steels himself against that which he calls his fate. A man says, "I know I am to be lost. I have sinned myself beyond all hope of mercy. And why should I trouble myself further?" Like a condemned criminal, who hears the hammers fitting up the scaffold and gives himself up to silent despair, he feels, "I am doomed—it is all over with me." O my Friend, it is not so! This is a lie of Satan's own invention. While you live, there is hope! While you are yet in the land where Christ is preached, you may come to Him and live.

But deadness, sullenness, and obstinacy are your worst enemies. Waters of enmity to God often run silently because they are so deep. The man has a settled enmity against God and this makes him set his teeth and defy the Almighty in

grim determination to perish. God save you from this! May you be driven out of every peace except that peace which comes from God! To that I now come.

God alone can speak true peace to the soul. When once a soul begins to feel its sinfulness and to tremble at the wrath to come, none but God can speak peace to it. Ministers cannot. I have often failed, when I have desired to bring comfort to troubled hearts. Books cannot do it, not even the most wise and gracious of them. The Bible itself cannot do it, apart from the Spirit of God. The ordinances of God's House, whether they are Baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or prayer, or preaching—none of these can bring peace to a heart apart from the still small voice of the Lord.

I pray that none of you may rest in anything short of a Divine assurance of salvation. See how the waves are tossing themselves on high! Hark to the howling of the wind! Rise, Peter, and bid the waves be quiet! Awake, John, and pour oil upon the waves! Ah, Sirs, the Apostles will themselves sink, unless a greater than they shall interpose. Only He who lay asleep near the tiller could say, "Peace, be still!" May He say that to everyone here who is troubled about his sins! The voice of the blood of Jesus speaks—"The peace of God, which passes all understanding." We read that on the storm-tossed lake, "there was a great calm." How great is the quiet of a soul which has seen and felt the power of the atoning sacrifice!

I have told you that only God can speak this peace. Let me remind you that He can give you that peace by *speaking* it. One word from the Lord is the quietus of all trouble. No deed is needed, only a word. Peace has not now to be made—the making of peace was finished more than eighteen hundred years ago on yonder Cross. The Lord Jesus, who is our peace, went up to the tree bearing our iniquities, and thus removed the dread cause of the great warfare between God and man. There He ended the quarrel of the Covenant. Harken to these words, "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him." He made peace by the blood of His Cross. Through His death, being justified by faith, we have peace with God. "It is finished."

Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Now is the way paved for man to come back to God by reconciliation through sacrifice. There is no more blood to be shed, nor sacrifice to be offered—peace is finally made and it only remains for the Lord God to speak it to the conscience and heart by the Holy Spirit. Yet think not that for God to speak is a little thing. His voice is omnipotence in motion. He spoke the universe out of nothing—He spoke light out of darkness. Where the word of our King is, there is power.

He speaks and it is done. If He speaks peace, who can cause trouble? In Jesus Christ there is Divine peace for the guilty soul. "Come unto Me," says He, "all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." From a tempest of distress to perfect peace—a word from the God of Peace can lift us in an instant.

Sooner or later the Lord will speak peace to His own. How blessed are the shalls and wills of the Lord God!—"He *will* speak peace unto His people." Doubt it not. He WILL. He WILL. Some of you have lost your peace for a while. Yet, if you are Believers, "He will speak peace unto His people." You have come to Christ and are trusting Him but you do not enjoy such peace as you desire. "He will speak peace unto His people." There may be a time of battling and of struggling, the noise of war may disturb the camp for months—but in the end—"He will speak peace unto His people."

I have seen some of the Lord's true people terribly harassed year after year. One for a very long time was in the dark—wrecked on a barbarous coast and neither sun nor moon appearing. I do not excuse him for some of his despondency. There was a fault, undoubtedly, and there may also have been weakness of the brain. But he was a true child of God and at length he came out into the light and wrote a book which has cheered many. If peace comes not before, yet, "Mark the perfect man and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."

The Lord will not put His child to bed in the dark—He will light his candle before he sleeps the sleep of death. Sickness of body and weakness of mind, or some other cause, may be a terrible kill-joy. But in the end, "The Lord will speak peace unto His people." He cannot finally leave a soul that trusts in Him. No Believer shall die of despair. You may sink very low—but underneath are the everlasting arms and these will bring you up again. Many women of a sorrowful spirit have a hard time of it, but yet the Lord has set a day in which He will give beauty for ashes. O captive Daughter, your chains last not forever! Hold on to your hope—the night is very dark but the morning will surely come—for as God is Light, so shall His children be.

Beloved, when the Lord does speak peace to His people, what a peace it is! It is sound and safe. You may have as much of it as you will and suffer no harm. The peace of God is never presumptuous. It is a holy peace. And the more you

have of it, the more you will strive to be like your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. It is a peace which rules the heart and mind and not merely the face and the tongue. It is a peace that will rise superior to circumstances. You may be very poor, but you shall find an inward wealth of contentment. You may be lonely, but communion with God will bring you company. You may be very sick in body, but peace of soul enables a man to bear pain without complaining.

There may even be a measure of depression of spirit about you and yet an inward peace will enable you to reason with yourself and say, “Why are you cast down, O my Soul? And why are you disquieted in me?” If God gives you peace, the devil cannot take it away. If God breathes peace into your soul, the roughest winds of earth or Hell cannot blow that peace from you. They that have enjoyed this peace will tell you that it is the dawn of Heaven. They that walk in the light of God’s countenance, at this moment, are as the courtiers of a king, and for them there is a Paradise restored. Perfect peace brings a joy of which no tongue can fully tell.

There is no war above—Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all reconciled to us. There is no war within—conscience is cleansed and the heart relieved. There is no fear even of the arch-enemy below. He may grind his teeth at us, but he cannot destroy us. Even the world of nature is at peace with us. “For you shall be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you.” “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” A deep peace, a high peace, a broad peace, an endless peace is ours.

“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” “Therefore being justified by faith, we have,” in the most emphatic and unlimited sense, “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Beloved Friends, do not be satisfied without the constant possession of unbroken peace. You may have it. You *ought* to have it. It will make you greater than princes and richer than misers. This peace will shoe your feet for ways of obedience or suffering. “May the peace of God keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!”

II. Now we must come down from our elevation, to talk about a more humbling theme, WHAT WE FEAR MAY MAR THIS BLESSING OF PEACE. “He will speak peace unto His people and to His saints: but let them not turn again to folly.”

The grounds of a Believer’s peace are always the same, but a Believer’s enjoyment of that peace varies very greatly. I always have a right to the Divine inheritance but I do not always enjoy the fruits of that inheritance. Peace may be broken with the Christian, through great trouble, if his faith is not very strong. It need not be so. For some of those who have had the greatest fight of affliction have had the sweetest peace in Christ Jesus.

Peace may be broken through some forms of disease which prey upon the mind as well as the body. And when the mind grows weak and depressed from what are physical causes rather than spiritual ones, the infirmity of the flesh is apt to crush spiritual peace. Yet it is not always so. For sometimes, when heart and flesh have failed, God has yet been the strength of our heart, as He is our portion forever.

Inward conflict, too, may disturb our enjoyment of peace. When a man is struggling hard against a sin, when some old habit has to be hung up before the Lord, when corruption grows exceedingly strong and vigorous—as at seasons it may do—the Believer may not enjoy peace as he would wish. And yet I have known warring times when the fight within has not diminished my peace. “How so?” you may ask. I have found peace in the very fact that I was fighting! I have seen clearly that if I were not a child of God, I should not struggle against sin.

The very fact that I contend against sin, as against my deadliest foe, proves that I am not under the dominion of sin. And that fact brings to my soul a measure of peace. Satan, too—oh, it is hard to have peace under his attacks! He has a way of beating his drum of Hell at a rate which will let no Believer rest. He can inject the most profane thoughts. He can flutter us and worry us, by making us think that we are the authors of the thoughts which he fathers upon us—which are his and not ours. It is a very glorious thing, then, to be able to say, “Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy; though I fall, yet shall I rise again.”

When the Lord hides His face, as He may do as the result of grave offense that we have given Him, ah, *then* we cannot have peace. Peace runs out to a very low ebb when we are under withdrawals. And then we cry, “Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His feet!” We can never rest till we again behold the smiles of His face and take our place among His children.

But, after all, the chief reason why a Christian loses his peace is because he “turns again to folly.” What kind of folly? Folly is sin and error and everything contrary to Divine wisdom. I will briefly show you a few of the different shapes of this folly.

There is the folly of hasty judgment. Have you ever judged without knowing and considering all the surroundings of the case? Have you not come to a wrong conclusion, when you have ventured to judge the dealings of God with you? You have said, “This cannot be wise, this cannot be right—at any rate, this cannot be a fruit of love.” But you have found out afterwards that you were quite mistaken, that your severest trial was sent in very faithfulness. Your rash judgment was most evidently folly. And if you turn again to such folly in your next season of sorrow, you will certainly lose your peace.

What? Will you measure the infinite wisdom of God by the rule of your short-sighted policy? Are eternal purposes to be judged of according to the ticking of the clock? There can be no peace when we assume the throne of judgment and dare accuse our Sovereign of unkindness or mistakes—

*“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His Grace.”*

Consider things in the long run when you would estimate the ways of God. Behold, He dwells in eternity and His measures are only to be seen in the light of the endless future. Oh, that we could either judge the Lord’s ways upon eternal principles, or leave off judging altogether! My Soul, be as a little child before the Lord and you will find peace!

Another kind of folly is of like order—it is repining and quarrelling with the Most High. Some are never pleased with God—how can He be pleased with them? There can be no use in contending with our Maker. For what are we as compared with Him? Let the grass contend with the scythe, or the tow fight with the flame. But let not man contend with God. Besides, who are you? “Who are you, O man, that replies against God?” It is true you may be, like Job, terribly smitten and brought very low, and you cannot understand the why and the wherefore of it. But I pray you bow your head in sweet submission, for your heavenly Father must be doing the best possible thing for you.

Kick not against the pricks. When the ox, newly yoked to the plow, kicks against the goad, what is the result? It drives the goad into its own flank. It would not have been so hurt had it not defied the driver. “It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.” No man, by quarrelling with God, can gain any advantage, for the right is on God’s side and eternal principles establish His government. When the boat wars with the rock, we know which will suffer. Yield, O my Brothers and Sisters, yield to the Lord of Love! Your hope can only climb on bended knee—your peace can only return with bowed head. For to proud rebellion there is no peace, since it is folly of the grossest kind.

Another kind of folly to which men often turn is that of doubt and distrust. What peace you have had has come by faith. And when faith departs, peace goes, also. To doubt the Lord is folly. Even the least degree of it is folly of the worst order. When you said, “God is true and I will trust Him,” then your peace was like a river. Hope in Christ and in nothing else but Christ. When your expectation is in the Lord alone, then will your peace be like a river.

Some lose their peace by turning again to the folly of intellectual speculation. Some of our friends, who once walked in the light, as God is in the light, and were as happy as all the birds of the air, have now lost their joy. And all because they have read a pernicious book, which started for them a whole host of difficulties of which they never dreamed before. Would you like me to answer those difficulties? Suppose I took the trouble to do so and succeeded, what would happen?

You would read another book tomorrow, and come to me with another set of doubts. And if we were to slay all these, you would simply invite another band of invaders to land on the shores of your mind. Therefore I decline to begin the endless task. At Mentone, the trouble of some of our friends is to catch the mosquitoes, which worry them. But there is little or no use in it. For if you catch a dozen of these little pests, twenty-four will come to the funeral.

It is just the same with these intellectual difficulties. You may, by overcoming some of them, make room for more of a worse kind. No fact, however certain, is beyond a critic’s questioning. I have done with the whole band of quibblers. People say, “Have you seen the new book? It is terribly unsettling.” It will not unsettle me—first, because I know what I know. And secondly, because I do not care one atom what the unbeliever has to say. I care, indeed, so little, that I am not curious even to know what his craze may happen to be. “I know whom I have believed.”

I am going no further than that which the Holy Spirit has taught me through the infallible Word of God. What is more, I am not going to waste my time by reading what every doubter may please to write. I have had enough of these

poisonous drugs, and will have no more. Does anyone say, “We ought to read everything”? No! No! If I go out to dinner and there should happen to come to table a steak that is far gone, I let it alone. When the knife goes into it, the perfume betrays it and I do not pass my plate up for a portion.

Others may carve slices from the carrion of unbelief. But having long eaten sweet Gospel food, I cannot bring my soul to feed on that which is unholy and only fit for dogs. That which denies Scripture and dishonors the blood of the Lord Jesus is more fit for burning than reading. If you have once been staggered by modern thought, do not turn again to that folly. Be not like silly people, who seem to fall down in the mud for the sake of being brushed. Why desire to be befogged and bewildered for the sake of getting set in the right way after long straying?

Stick to the Scriptures. When you have read so much of your Bibles that there is nothing more in them, then you may devote your time and study to some other book. But for the present keep to the Book whose author is the All-Wise Jehovah. Between the covers of this Book you shall find all wisdom—and I pray you turn not again to the folly which opposes the infallible and censures the perfect. God grant us Divine Grace to maintain our peace by never turning again to the folly of human wisdom!

But the worst form of folly is sin. Scripture continually calls sinners fools, and so they are. What a touching pleading there is about this use of language! “God will speak peace unto His people. But let them not turn again to folly.” As much as to say, “to turn aside will not only grieve Me, but it will harm you. Sin is not only fault, but folly. It will be to your own injury as well as to My displeasure.”

Dear child of God, are you out in the storm just now? Have you no rest? Let me whisper in your ear. Is there not a cause? Somebody on board your vessel has brought this storm upon you. Where is he? He is not among the regular sailors that work the ship. He is neither captain nor mate. But he is a stranger. Down under the hatches is a man named Jonah—is he the cause of the tempest? “No,” you say, “he is a good fellow, for he paid his fare.”

This makes me feel all the more suspicious. He is the cause of the mischief. You will never get peace until the Jonah of sin is overboard. Cast him into the sea and it will be calm. Many a child of God harbors a traitor and hardly knows that he is doing so. And the Lord is at war with him because of the harbored rebel. When Joab pursued Sheba, the son of Bichri, he came to the city of Abel, where Sheba had taken shelter. A wise woman came to him out of the city and pleaded for the people. Joab explained to her that he warred not with the city but with the rebel. And he added, “Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city.”

Then they cut off the head of Sheba and cast it out to Joab and he blew a trumpet and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. God is besieging you with trials and distresses, turning His batteries against your walls. And there is no chance of any peace until the traitorous sin shall be given up to vengeance. I do not know what particular sin it may be, but the head of it must be thrown over the wall—and then the warriors of the Lord will go their way. Bring forth the Achan, and the accursed thing, and let all Israel stone him with stones. Search and see! Arrest the hidden foe!

“Are the consolations of God too small for you? Is there any secret thing with you?” God help us to institute a solemn search this morning and may we discover the intruder and destroy him!

Beloved, I pray that no one of us may go back to folly. If we have ever tasted the peace of God and communion with God, can we leave it for earthly joys? Can we quit the banquets of infinite love for the coarse pleasures of sin? God forbid! Remember all the sorrow which sin has cost you already. Take not this viper a second time to your bosom. We were drowned in tears and sunken in distress when we found ourselves guilty of sin. Further and further from it may we fly. But never, never, may we turn back!

Remember what it cost your Lord to make you free from the consequences of former folly—never return to it. He had to die to save us from our folly—shall we count His death as nothing? Think what tugs the Spirit of God has had with us to bring us so far on our journey towards Heaven—are we now willing to turn our backs on God and holiness? Consider also what lies just beyond. Look a little way before you. Think of the street of gold, the river which never dries, the trees which bear eternal fruit, the harps of ceaseless melody.

Beloved, we cannot turn again to folly! O God, do not permit us to do so! Grant us Your peace, that by it we may be kept, both in heart and mind, loyal to You! Peace spoken to the soul by the Holy Spirit is the sure preventive of turning again to folly. Be sure that, if it passes all understanding, it also conquers all folly.

With minds at perfect peace with God, we set our face like a flint, and press on towards the haven where peace will never end. Glory be to God, who will bring us safely there! Amen.

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