

Perfect Peace
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Second Sunday in Advent: PEACE

John MacArthur cites in his fine book, Anxious for Nothing, (pp.15-16):

Holmes: You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.

Watson: Frequently.

Holmes: How Often?

Watson: Well, some hundreds of times.

Holmes: Then how many are there?

Watson: How many? I don't know.

Holmes: Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have seen and observed. —The Complete Sherlock Holmes, 1927

Several things can be extrapolated from this exchange that will help us be more like Holmes and less like Watson. **But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not just hearers who deceive themselves** (James 1:22) is not one of them! We can determine that by observing James 1:22 in its proper setting (see below).

21 Therefore, ridding yourselves of all filthiness and all ^[a]¹that remains of wickedness, in [b]humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not just hearers who deceive themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his [c]natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, [d]he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who has looked intently at the perfect law, the *law* of freedom, and has continued *in it*, not having become a forgetful hearer but [e]an active doer, this person will be blessed in [f]what he does.

We see v. 22 in context but we have to observe it to comprehend its meaning. However, we do see the **forgetfulness** which prevents seeing from rising to observing! And we note that **looking intently** and **continuing in it (the perfect law)** augment and assist “seeing” to move to the level of “observing.” And this despite the pun fashioned by observing meaning paying attention and putting into practice! And we should note, in passing, the impediments to “observing” entailed in

¹Footnotes

- a. James 1:21 Lit *abundance of malice*
 - b. James 1:21 Or *gentleness*
 - c. James 1:23 Lit *the face of his birth; or nature*
 - d. James 1:24 Lit *and he*
 - e. James 1:25 Lit *a doer of a work*
 - f. James 1:25 Lit *his doing*
- of them.

the business of **ridding yourselves of all filthiness and . . . wickedness**. Sin impairs our ability to see rightly, and observe correctly. But, let's move on.

"Seeing" and "observing" are similar to "hearing" and "comprehending" and to "reading" and "understanding." So, as we just did in James¹, we "read" about the purity of heart which attends **receiving the word implanted . . . which is able to save your souls!** (v. 21) which teaches us that this passage is primarily concerned with the salvation of one's soul and not, say, moral reformation that must precede the **humility** that comes before internalization of truth suggested by **implanted**. That which is **implanted** must necessarily come from outside oneself! **The word** which originates in heaven (outside oneself) is brought by revelation and then it can be internalized by the observant hearer—given that he is neither careless, nor forgetful. Intense study and diligence are important skills in biblical interpretation.

Armed with this, we note that peace appears in the gifts' list in Galatians 5. It is listed, not defined, or expounded there. For understanding "peace" we must go to passages such as Genesis 26, the Advent reading, which takes us there. The 26th chapter contains two "appearances" of the Lord to His servant Isaac—and these appearances supply reassurance and encourage trust. Vv. 2-5, the first, details God's commandment to Isaac: **Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell you**. I am telling you where not to go and I will tell you where to sojourn *which must mean "to live temporarily" because the time for the granting of these lands to you descendants is not yet! Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you*, (again, God reassures Isaac of his continued presence and favor, or kind intentions) **for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath** (what I have promised to do, I will surely do—for I am a constant God, *I am reliable, trustworthy*, I do not promise anything I will not consummate!) **that I swore to Abraham your father**. There is the first ground of peace: God will be with him. **I will be with you and bless you**. The promise of the land, and the word that **all the nations of the earth will be blessed in his offspring** follows from the obedience of Abraham: (he) **obeyed my voice** (I communicate, speak with men!) **and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws**. (v. 5)

If we are looking for evidence of the existence of the law prior to the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, we need look no farther. The **charge, commandments, statutes and laws** could hardly be more comprehensively and explicitly stated *and so remain as indirect evidence of Abraham's obedience/righteousness* and as a summary of **the way of the Lord** alluded to in Gen. 18:19:

19 For I have [a]chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

V. 5 is a summary of content of the things that Isaac was taught by his father. This we have, but not the lesson plans, nor observations of the teaching experience.

The second appearance (vv. 23-25) is recorded thus:

23 And he went up from there to Beersheba. 24 And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said,

**“I am the God of your father Abraham;
Do not fear, for I am with you.
I will bless you and multiply your [a]descendants,
For the sake of My servant Abraham.”**

25 So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac’s servants dug a well.

So, added to the previous grounds, to **sojourn** here, **I will be with you and bless you, I will give you all these lands.** . . is spoken, **Do not fear, for I am with you.** This occurs providentially on the eve of a peace meeting with Abimelech and Ahuzzath who had followed Isaac from Gerar to Beersheba². Isaac moves there by a series of disputed water rights, wells that his men had dug but the Philistines, and later the men of Gerar filled up, or commandeered. Isaac’s flocks inherited from Abraham were vast and in addition to being very wealthy, Isaac was gently feared by his pagan neighbors. It was a hostile environment and peace was a commodity to be sought. All of this relates to peace on a temporal level, peace between people groups some settled and others migrating, looking for a place to settle. But the peace we need to understand is of a different order. John 14:25-32:

25 “These things I have spoken to you while remaining with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, *and remind you* of all that I said to you.

27 Peace I leave you, My peace I give you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. [a]³Do not let your hearts be troubled, nor [b]fearful. 28 You heard that I said to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you. ’If you loved Me, *you would have rejoiced [c]*because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

29 And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. 30 I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has [d]nothing in regard to Me, 31 but so that the world may know that I love the Father, [e]I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let’s go from here.

We observe that peace is part of the farewell discourses—important enough for our Lord to mention before His death and resurrection.

It is advance warning (very helpful) and is coupled with a promise (**the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name**). The Spirit teach us **all things**: this probably refers to **all truth** regarding the Lord’s resume mission as well as a refreshed course on what the Lord already instructed us on. (It seems that we take

²(This relocation narrative follows the childhood history of Isaac’s two sons, ending with where Esau sells his birthright to Jacob, Gen. 25:19-34.)

³Footnotes

- a. John 14:27 Or *Stop letting your hearts*
- b. John 14:27 Or *cowardly*
- c. John 14:28 Or *that*
- d. John 14:30 I.e., no grounds for any accusation
- e. John 14:31 Lit *and just as the Father...so I do*

advantage of this feature more than we should—if we were more diligent and attentive.) Certainly this is related to the **Peace** that follows, meaning that what Jesus has taught, the ministry of the Holy Spirit are grounds for **His peace** as well as the assurances that follow—**don't be troubled, or fearful** (this in view of the terrifying events that would follow was necessary to express—no matter what happens to Me, don't you be troubled, or fearful, the outcome is good. Besides, "I'll be back": **'I am going away, and I am coming to you.'** **I am going away to be with the Father, if you loved Me you would have rejoiced** (to hear that, to know that, to comprehend that—**there is nothing in all the cosmos to compare with the joy, beauty, pleasure and love that accompanies one being with the Father!** **That is what Jesus came to earth to secure for all who believe in Him!** **And Jesus gets to lead the way there!!** The Father is greater. You ponder that, consider that privilege and that exultation.

Then, there is the peace that comes from knowing ahead of time what is about to transpire: **And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe**. There lies exposed he who grind and purposes of John's writing his gospel, **that you may believe . . . and be utterly saved! Eternally blessed**. And then the discourse closes because the time for action has arrived.

To learn more about that peace, the peace brought by the Prince of Peace, we must turn to our reading from Isaiah 26. **Thou will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusted in Thee.** (v.3) The chapter has unity in that it is a song, a "song of a city." Actually, the song contrast two cities: the City of God *which Jesus is concerned about obtaining access to for those who trust in Him!* We could describe it as "the aggregate of ransomed souls" which make up Zion of prophecy and which is the same as the "heavenly Jerusalem."

The other city, an earthly, robber city, "the city of confusion, the center of power hostile to God and man" which is **laid low . . . cast down to the dust . . . trampled under the feet of the poor and the needy**, that city is brought under judgment. Its function was to foreshadow the celestial city where our citizenship in heaven, beyond the sea of time, is ordained by God to be. This city consists of intrusive and false things of our fleeting present! They claim a reality that only the city of God possesses. Things here are but shows and shadows of the things to come and remain. The things that are eternal, permanent and fixed are features of the peace that Jesus gives—**My peace**, a peace that the world cannot, and does not afford us. "The city's walls are salvation. There is no need to name the architect of these fortifications. Only one hand can pile their strength. God appoints salvation in lieu of all visible defenses. Whom He purposes to save are saved. Whom He will to keep safe are kept safe. *They who shelter behind that strong defense need no other.* Weak, sense-governed hearts may crave something more palpable, but they do no really need it," (Maclaren's "Expositions," Isiah 26:1—Isaiah 26:10)

Think on this: there is "an unseen but existent order of things, or polity to which men on earth may belong (**the Kingdom of God**) and which will, one day after the shocks and convulsions that shatter all that is merely institutional and human, **be**

manifested still more gloriously.” It is not merely that the best is yet to come, but that what is yet to come is exceedingly glorious! Christ triumphant and reigning in our midst. “Altogether apart from the existing and visible order of things in which we dwell, there is a polity to which we may belong, for **ye are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and that that order is indestructible.**” Jesus is alluding to, and I am speaking of “the state polity of Heaven, *the* cit which hath *the* foundations. “God’s polity, His form of human society of which the perfect ideal and antitype, so to speak, lies concealed in the heavens, is everlasting”—to be revealed in the end, the last hour.

Because of this understanding, this perspective, because we now that the foundations of God stand firm, whether we speak of the city, or of the polity that prevails therein, we assume a calm, triumphant expectation (“Peace”) that the city of God is arriving, it will be manifest and apparent to all. “We have a *strong* city—existent, immortal, and yet to be revealed.” Some may elect to hold life by its “transient, trivial and contemptible side” but we do not. We choose the calm, silent, out real and eternal order, above and beyond the stars, and history and the reach of time and we attach our lives to that reality, and that reality which Christ bequeathed to us: **My peace I give to you.** Peace is the proffer of eternal life. It is more than calm down, and do no harm . . . it is **Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.** Jesus offers, hopefully we will take the offer and enter into His peace now and forever.

Amen.