

The Best of Masters

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that Christ offers a peace and generosity far surpassing the world's empty promises, giving true and present blessings to sinners and believers alike.

Scripture: John 14:27, Isaiah 55:8-9, Romans 8:28, Hebrews 4:3

Topics: "Peace of Christ", "Grace and Mercy"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound difference between the peace and gifts offered by Christ and those given by the world. Drawing from John 14:27, Spurgeon emphasizes that Christ's peace is genuine, present, and enduring, unlike the world's empty promises and fleeting comfort. He challenges listeners to trust fully in Christ's abundant grace and to rest in the security of His love, even amid life's storms.

Transcript

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, I give unto you."—John 14:27.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN is peculiarly the history of Jesus, the Son of God. Matthew deals with Jesus as the Prince of the house of David; Mark treats of him as the Servant of servants; and Luke views him as the Son of Man; but John, with eagle eye, looks beyond all the clouds of his humanity, and seeing the clear shining of his divinity, writes of him especially as the Son of God, the Word, that in the beginning was with God and was God. It seems but right, then, that since Jesus came from heaven, he should sometimes put both himself and his cause, in contrast with that which is of the earth, earthy. You will find through several chapters wherein our Saviour is addressing his disciples, he continually contrasts himself, his gifts, and his love, with those of the world. He came from heaven that he might fight and wrestle with an evil and a wicked world; that he might rescue his people from it; that he might cleanse the world, and, at last, might present the earth itself to himself, to be the new heaven and the new earth, wherein righteousness should dwell. I say, it seems but right, that in a gospel which particularly views Christ as of heavenly origin, and as very God of very God, that there should frequently be a contrast between Christ and the world, between the kingdom which is from heaven, and the kingdoms of this earth. Now, our text presents us with one contrast between Christ and the world: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." He gives after a diviner fashion than the world can ever give, even when its hand is most laden with its gifts.

Now, I shall take my text this morning, and endeavor to talk of it thus—first, viewing it with regard to the peace which Christ gives: he does not give peace as the world gives it. Secondly, I shall take a larger view of the subject, and look upon all the gifts of Christ, and say that, “not as the world giveth, doth he bestow his mercies on us;” and then close with a practical inference from the whole subject.

I. First of all, IN THE MATTER OF PEACE, Christ gives us peace, but not as the world gives it. For, in the first place, the world gives peace in a complimentary style. It was usual among the Orientals, for the wayfarer to say to the person whom he met, “Peace be to you;” and generally, when a house was entered, the benediction of peace was bestowed by every person who stepped across the threshold. These were often but vain and empty expressions of compliment. Those very utterances might proceed from the lips of an enemy. “The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords.” It is the same with the world at this day. Everyone salutes us in writing with a “Dear sir,” or a “My dear sir,” and concludes “Yours very truly,” and “Yours sincerely.” We call all “friends,” and if we meet but casually we express the utmost anxiety with regard to one another’s health, and we carefully enquire after each other’s families; when perhaps we shall no sooner have passed by the person than we shall forget his existence, and certainly shall entertain no anxious thoughts with regard to his welfare, nor any loving remembrance of him. The world gives very largely when it gives compliments. Oh, what blessings would descend upon all our heads, if the blessings uttered could be blessings bestowed. Even when the “Good bye” is given, which translated means, “God be with you”—if that could be but true, and if God could be with us, in answer to that prayer, so little understood, how rich might we be! But alas! the way of the world is, “Be thou warmed and be thou filled;” but it hath not that which should warm, nor that which should fill. It is a world of words; high-sounding, empty, all-deceiving words. Now, not so, does Christ give. If he says “Peace be with you,” his benediction is most true and full of sweet sincerity. He left his own peace in heaven, that he might give the peace which he enjoyed with his Father, to us in this world of sorrow, for thus he puts it, “My peace I give unto you.” Christ, when he blesses, blesses not in word only, but in deed. The lips of truth cannot promise more than the hands of love will surely give. He gives not in compliment.

Furthermore, even when the world’s wishes of peace are sincere, what are they but mere wishes. If I am met by my most sincere friend, and he wishes to give a benediction, he cannot bestow one. ‘Tis God’s to bless his people with peace. We may bless with the wish but not with the deed. It may be our desire that every mercy should cluster round the head of our friend—that his pillow should be smooth, that his path should be easy, that his heart should be happy, that his end may be peace; but we must leave it with God to fulfill our prayers. If our power were equal to our will, how richly would we bless our friends with the priceless jewel of peace. But Christ says, “Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.” His wishes for us shall be accomplished, and he himself shall work them out. Does he wish for us that we may be sanctified? Lo! he will sanctify us, and present us without spot, or wrinkle, or any such things. Is it his will that we should be with him where he is? It shall be done, and we shall behold his glory and we shall share in it. There was ne’er a wish in Christ’s heart with regard to his people that merely ended in a wish. The wish is but the bow string; the blessing is the arrow shot from it. Christ hath not an empty bow, but his quiver is filled with arrows, and every time he wisheth, he fitteth a blessing on the string and sendeth it to us. Oh rest assured that not, as the world giveth, with the empty wish, the deceitful brook, the empty well doth Christ give to us, but he gives a fullness and a reality in all that he bestows.

Yet, furthermore, I may remark that, with regard to peace, the world gives only peace in prospect. There is not a man alive who is not hoping for better times; even boys believe that better times are coming—times

of rest and peace. The man who is just beginning in business expects that he shall take his rest and be much at ease, when he shall have succeeded in establishing a connection; or if he finds that, as business increases, cares multiply, he hopes that, in a little time, the whole matter will become more steady, and that by the employment of honest persons, much of the care may be taken from him. And that time comes; but he finds that, even then, there are fresh cares which have arisen as the others have died out. He then looks forward to the time when, in his green old age, he shall retire to some country retreat, and there spend the rest of his days in peace. For the most part that is but a vision, and grey age in its retirement hath its troubles still; still, when men grow old, trouble is as young as ever, and man finds just as much to prick and wound in the thorns of earth as when for the first time he trod its soil. We are all intending and beginning to be peaceful; we are all going to be happy by-and-bye. We have all made up our minds that soon we will have done with desiring more, and then we will make our rest. This is the miraculous mistake of man,—that he is always beginning to live; but he never does live; he always intends to be satisfied, but he never is; he always means to sit down in content, but that period never arrives. He has always something to vex him, but still hopes the day shall come when he shall be vexed no more. Now, not as the world giveth gives Christ to us. The world puts before us a mirage in the desert. We see before us what we fancy to be springs of water, and spreading palm trees; and we rush forward, but it is not there. It is only a few rods ahead, and on we go, full wearily and foot-sore, and now it is a little further on; still we hurry on, but as we progress the vision flies before us, but we never reach it. Not thus doth Christ bless. He gives, and gives now; he gives in present foretaste, and will give assuredly in the world which is to come. Yes, even now, the true Christian can say he has peace in Christ. Oh! there are some of us who know what it is to be so content and happy when our thoughts are exercised upon our standing in Christ, that we could say we have not a wish beyond; we could sit still for ever, and rest in him. Verily, we can testify that they who have believed do enter into rest. We have seen the billows roar, we have marked the storm gathering, we have seen the black clouds big with tempest, gathering over-head; and we have been enabled to defy all these things, and to find rest in Christ, notwithstanding. Nay, and when the clouds have emptied out their horrors, when the lightnings have scathed the brow of darkness, and the thunder has rolled, tremendous, through the sky, we have known what it is, even then, to rest in the bosom of Christ, as a babe upon the breast of its mother. We have had a quiet and a perfect rest while the world has been in arms abroad. Christ gives a real peace, not a something that we have to hunt after for to-morrow, but a thing that we have now. And the true believer can say that, when he is enabled to see himself in Christ, he has all he wants; he can rest on beds of spices, feed among the lillies of satisfaction, and neither ask nor wish for anything beyond. "Peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth. give I unto you."

Yet again, I remark once more, that all the peace which the world ever did give to any man, was a delusion. I know some who possess the world's peace; I would to God that peace were broken. Some of you are content with yourselves; you are good enough you say, or, if not good enough, 'tis easy to amend. You fold your arms, and you say, "Why make myself miserable about religion? Why trouble myself about the interests of another world?" Ah man! I would to God thou couldst be made wretched—that thou couldst be made miserable, for mark, me, thy sleep is the sleep of death. It is one of the devil's great devices for destroying souls, to satisfy men—to give them the drug of indifference, the laudanum of procrastination, and so to stultify and stupify them, that they go on from day to day, careless and reckless, till in hell they lift up their eyes. Why, if you are concerned about your souls there is hope for you; the way to peace lies through distress. You must first be agitated before you can be pacified. But, if you now say, "peace, peace," I tell you there is no peace; and if you now say, "be quiet, be still, hush!" I warn you, that all the quiet of which you boast is the hush before the hurricane, when the world seems as if it stood still in terror, when the birds droop their wings upon the trees, and cease their notes, when the very lion hides himself in

the thicket, and when he roars no more, but is still, waiting for the rushing wings of tempest. Here is a picture of your vaunted peace! Your calm is but a prelude of an eternal storm. The sunshine of to-day is but the index of the awful shower of to-morrow, a shower of red rain of vengeance, and of hail mingled with fire. Oh, the peace the world gives is delusive. They that rest there, rest upon a bed of death; but the peace which Christ gives is no delusion. When the Christian can sit down and say "I have nothing to fear. I have nothing to trouble me—nothing to tremble at, neither for this world, nor for the next," he is not saying one word more than he has good ground for saying; nay he is not going so far as he might go. He may say

"Now let earth's old pillars shake,
And all the wheels of nature break,
My stedfast soul shall fear no more,
Than solid rocks when billows roar."

That peace has no pretense in it. It is not bombast; it is a reality, Profound though it be, it is not one whit more profound than it is warranted to be. The believer rests upon a solid rock, and all the waves of trouble can never make that rock give way, or shake the foundation of his peace. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

II. Now having touched upon the first point, I come to the second IN THE MATTER OF GIVING. Take a broad view of it. In whatever the world gives, Christ does not give after the same fashion.

Again, if you will serve the world, and you wish to have gifts from it, the world will pay you half-heartedly. Now by the world, I mean the religious world quite as much as any other part of it; I mean the whole world, religious, political, good, bad, and indifferent—the whole lot of them. If you serve the world it will pay you half-heartedly. Let a man spend himself for his fellow-creatures' interests, what will he get for it? Some will praise him, some will abuse him. The men that escape without abuse in this world, are the men who do nothing at all. He who is most valiant and useful, must expect to be most reprobated and abhorred. Those men who are borne upon the waves of popular applause are not the men whose worth is true; real philanthropists must swim against the stream. The whole list of the world's benefactors is an army of martyrs. All along, the path of the good is marked with blood and fire. The world does not pay the men that serve it really, except with ingratitude. I say, to come back, even when the world does pay, it pays half-heartedly. Did you ever know a man yet, concerning whom the world's mind was one? I never heard of any. "Oh," says one, "So-and-so is one of the best men of his times." Go down the next street, and you will hear it said, "He is the biggest vagabond living." Go to one, and you will hear him say, "I never heard a man of such genius as that is." "Oh," says another, "mere twaddle." "There is such a newspaper," says one, "how ably it defends the rights of the people." "Oh," says another, "mere democracy; seeking to pull down everything that is constitutional and proper." The world never made up its mind about any man yet. There is not a soul living concerning whom the world is unanimous. But when Christ gives anything, he always gives with all his heart. He does not say to his people, "There, I give you this, but still I have half-a-mind to keep it back." No, Christ gives his heart to all his people. There is no double-mindedness in Jesus. If we are enabled by free grace to serve him and to love him, we may rest quite sure that in the rich reward which his grace shall give us, his whole heart shall go with every blessing. When Christ blesses the poor needy soul, he does not give with one hand, and smite with the other; but he gives him mercies with both his hands—both full; and he asks the sinner simply to receive all that he is willing to give.

Then again, whenever the world gives anything, it gives mostly to those who do not want it. I remember once, when a lad, having a dog, which I very much prized and some man in the street asked me to give him the dog; I thought it was pretty impudent, and I said as much. A gentlemen, however, to whom I told it, said, "Now suppose the Duke of So-and-so,"—who was a great man in the neighborhood—"asked you for the dog, would you give it him?" I said, "I think I would." He said, "Then you are just like all the world; you would give to those who do not want." Who in the whole of this congregation would object to give anything to the Queen? Not a soul of us, and yet, perhaps, there is no person in the world who so little needs our gifts. We can always give to those who do not require anything; for we feel that there is some little honor conferred upon us—an honor bestowed by the reception. Now, look at Jesus. When he gives to his friends, he gets no honor from them: the honor is in his own free heart that should lead him to give to such poor necessitous worms. Great men have gone to Christ with mere professions, and they have asked him to be good to them, but then they have at the same time declared, that they had a righteousness of their own, and did not want much of him; and he has sent them about their business, and given them nothing. He said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." But whenever poor, lost sinners have gone to Christ, he has never turned one of them away—never. He has given all they could possibly want, and infinitely more than they thought they could ever expect. Might not Jesus say to us, when we ask him for the blessings of his grace, "You are impudent in daring to ask." But instead of that, he loves to be asked, and he freely and richly gives—"Not as the world giveth;" for he gives to those who need it most.

Again, there is another view of the world's gifts. The world giveth to its friends, Any man will help his own friends. If we help not our own relatives and friends then are we worse than heathen men and publicans. But the world generally confines its good wishes and blessings to its class, and kith, and kin. It cannot think of giving blessings to its enemies. Did you ever hear yet of the world's blessing an enemy? Never. It gives its benefactions to its friends, and but very scantily even to them. But Christ gives his benefactions to his enemies. "Not as the world giveth" he may truly say. The world says, "I must see whether you deserve it; I must see that your case is a good one." It enquires, and enquires, and enquires again; but Christ only sees that our case is a bad one, and then he gives. He wants not a good case but a bad case. He knows our necessity, and, once discovering our necessity, not all our sin can stop the hand of his bounty. Oh, if Jesus should call to mind some of the hard speeches we have uttered about him, he would never bless us surely, if it were not that his ways are far above our ways. Why, remember man, it is not long ago since you cursed him—since you laughed at his people—despised his ministers, and could spit upon his Bible. Jesus has cast all that behind his back, and loved you notwithstanding. Would the world have done that? Let a man get up and rail at his fellows, will they forgive, and, after forgiving, will they begin to bless? Will they die for their enemies? Oh, no! such a thing never entered into the heart of manhood. But Christ blesses rebels, traitors, enemies to his cross. He brings them to know his love, and taste of his eternal mercies.

A thousand remarks seem to start up and I scarcely know which to choose. "Not as the world giveth give I unto you." The world always gives with a sparing motive. The most of us are compelled to economy, if we give anything away to a poor man we generally hope that he will not come again. If we give him half-a-crown it is very often as we say to get rid of him. If we bestow a little charity it is in the hope that we shall not see his face just by-and-bye, for really we do not like the same men continually begging at our door when the world is so full of beggars. Did you ever hear of a man who gave a beggar something to encourage him to keep on begging of him? I must confess I never did such a thing, and am not likely to begin. But that is just what Christ does. When he gives us a little grace, his motive is to make us ask for more; and when he gives us more grace it is given with the very motive, to make us come and ask again.

He gives us silver blessings to induce us to ask for golden mercies; and when we have golden favors, those same mercies are given on purpose to lead us to pray more earnestly, and open our mouth wider that we may receive more. What a strange giver Christ is! what a strange friend, that he gives on purpose to make us beg more! The more you ask of Christ, the more you can ask; the more you have got, the more you will want; the more you know him, the more you will desire to know him; the more grace you receive, the more grace you will pant after; and when you are full of grace, you will never be content till you get full of glory. Christ's way of giving is, "Of his fullness have we received, and grace for grace"—grace to make us pant for more grace; grace to make us long after something higher, something fuller and richer still. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

Again; when the world gives anything it is almost always with a selfish motive. The Christian man gives, not hoping to receive again; but the world lends that it may borrow; it gives that it may receive. There are many men whose whole lives are a looking after self. They would not like to be told so; but even their benefactions to a hospital, or to a charity, are merely given because the name should be in the list. We know that too many persons would not think of relieving private want unless they thought there was a merit in it, and so thought it would stand good for them at last. They would infinitely prefer to do their good in the lumps. I know, at this day, a man that I believe would give twenty pounds, fifty pounds, or a hundred pounds to a charity, but who would let his own relatives starve rather than give them anything, because it would never be known,—no one would talk about it. The world's motive for bestowing a blessing is in order that some rich fruit may flow from it. If the world rewards a warrior, its ostensible reason is that other soldiers may fight bravely. If it rewards some great artist, it is to encourage the profession, that is, to help themselves, by getting others to amuse them, as well as this man has done. There is always an ulterior object in the world's generosity. Not so in Christ's; when he gives us mercies, he has nothing whatever to get from us. It is our delight to live to him; but our living to him cannot increase his glory—he is God over all, blessed for ever. He gives us more than he can ever receive. And though we with grateful hearts desire to live to him, that very gratitude is first his gift. The well of love is filled out of the spring of God, otherwise it had been the grave of mercies, and not a fountain of praise.

Now, what more shall I say? I seem to have brought out the most prominent point of the world's giving, but let me add one more. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." All that the world gives, it only bestows for a season, it must go back again. Thou hast riches, man, as the reward of thy toils. What shalt thou be the better for them in a few short months? Thy broad acres, thy leagues of land shall dwindle into a short six feet of clay. Thy mansion, what shall it shrivel into, but into a small coffin, over which shall be scratched a little earth to hide thy putrid dust, and save the world a nuisance? The world will have all back of thee. Naked thou didst come into it, and it will take care thou shalt take nothing out of it, for naked shalt thou go out of it again. Oh, man, thou hast accumulated knowledge until thou hast become a walking cyclopaedia, but what shalt thou take with thee? What difference shall there be between thy hollow skull and that of the meanest peasant, when some wanton sexton, in some future year, shall take it up, or split it with his spade? What shalt thou be the better for all those big thoughts that have stretched thy skull, and all those marvellous conceptions that have made it ache so much, that thou couldst scarcely carry it upon thy shoulders? Thou wilt go back again to thy fellow earth, and the worm shall eat thee, and the philosopher shall taste no sweeter to his tooth than did the peasant; And, then, whether thou be prince or king, or whether thou be a poor, ignorant man, the worms shall make no distinction. Thou shalt still rot—still be consumed; noisome gases and a handful of dust shall be thy whole residuum. What then can the world give? If it tried it could not give thee anything that would last; it cannot give thee anything better than air. It can give thee nothing that can pass into eternity with thee. What though it follow thee with the trumpet of

fame? That trumpet cannot be heard half-way across the Jordan. If all the men in the world clapped their hands in thy praise, not one angel, even on the very borders of the celestial world would observe the tumult of applause. The world can give thee nothing that thou canst carry with thee. Thou art at the best a pack-horse, that shall carry its burden till it ends its journey, and then it must lie down and die. Thou dost but carry a burden on thy back, and verily, death shall unload thee ere thou art suffered to enter another world. How different is Christ in his gifts! What he gives he gives for ever. When he bestows mercies they are lasting things; no shadows does he give, but real substance—no fancies, but eternal realities does he bestow. Oh, men of this world, when your gold is melted—when your diamonds have dissolved in gas—when your estates have gone—when your hopes are lost, and when your goods are destroyed, then shall the people of God begin to know their riches; then shall they shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. “Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”

III. Now this brings me to one PRACTICAL REFLECTION, OR RATHER EXHORTATION TO GOD'S PEOPLE. If this be true, my hearer, I beseech thee serve not the world; serve none but Christ, for he is the best master; serve him with all thy might, because he so richly hath given and so richly will give. I would not serve the world for the best empire in it. A king once said he wished all his subjects could be kings for a day, for “they would soon discover,” he said, “that the art of governing is not so easy as they think, and that a crown is not so soft a thing to wear as they imagine.” No, the world may abuse us if it likes; if it abuse us we are not very sad thereat, because the world is not our master, and as long as our own Master is satisfied we care not for a stranger. If any one should walk into your garden, and say to your gardener, “I do not like the arrangement of these beds; I do not like those flowers; you are evidently a careless man;” he would say, “Well, my master has been round this morning; he did not say much, but I saw a smile of satisfaction on his face, therefore, what is that to you? it is no business of yours. I am not your servant; I do not serve you.” Now, the world is a bad paymaster to those that obey and serve it. Let every Christian make up his mind that he will have nothing to do with serving the world. If the world scorns and frowns, let him say, “It is no business of yours; you are not my master; I do not serve you. If it amuses you to abuse me go on; it will not hurt me.” There is even in the mind of Christians at times too much of a tendency to time-serving. We are all so apt to think that we really must bow to public opinion, to this, that, and the other. Oh! you will never be happy until the Holy Ghost has brought you to this,—that you will fear God, and that you will fear no one else—that you will serve God with undivided heart. I go further: I would not even serve the church if I must have it for a master. I can serve God, I can serve Christ; for Christ is a blessed master; but I would not advise any of you to make the church your master. Wherever the church is we are all bound to serve the brethren, to serve the church of Christ as we are bound to assist in a common cause, but think not that even the dictum of the church is to be your judge. Imagine not that even its praise is that which you are to seek. You are to seek the praise of Christ. His church may do wrong, his ministers may mistake, but Christ himself can never be in error. Serve Christ—this is the practical exhortation from the whole subject. My dear friends, you that love Christ, and have been chosen by him from before the foundation of the world, who have been bought with his blood, have been washed, and pardoned, and forgiven, if Christ gives to you, not as the world gives then I beseech you serve Christ better than worldlings serve the world. Oh, it is astonishing what men have done to serve the world. They have rushed to the cannon's mouth, and given their life to be food for powder, and they have thought they were well rewarded with a little praise. Men, too, have sweated at the furnace; they have spent their livings, have starved their families, to invent some luxuries for the tables of the rich. Men have undergone unheard of labors, toils that positively appal you to read of, merely to become eminent in their profession, to be first in the rank of artisans among which they were numbered.

When the world has a gulf to fill, it never lacks a Curtis to leap into it, but Christ often sees his cause left and deserted by reason of the coldness of his friends. There is many a battle wherein the warriors of Christ turn their backs, though armed and carrying bows. I was thinking yesterday, and the thought struck me forcibly, that one thousand eight hundred years ago, or a little more, there were a few men met in an upper chamber met for worship—about four hundred of them. They met, and they prayed, and they preached, and there was a divine fire kindled in their bosoms; and in a few years, they had preached the gospel in every language under heaven, and the mass of the world became professedly Christians. Now here is a room, not with four hundred persons, but oftentimes filled with thousands, and yet, does the religion of Christ progress as it should do? No. If there were but a little, but a hundredth part of the zeal of Christ's disciples that there was in olden times, before another year rolls round, there would be missionaries in every town; the gospel would be preached in every village of India, and China, and every other nation accessible to the foot of the missionary. As it is we are an idle generation, a tribe of dwarfs has succeeded to a race of giants, and now Christ's cause creeps where it once ran, and only runs where once it was wont to fly as with wings of lightning. Oh, that God would make bare his arm! And if ever he does, the first sign of it will be that the church will begin to serve Christ more zealously. Some will give their blood to die in the preaching of the Word. Others will pour their wealth into coffers of the church and every living soul, numbered in the family of Christ, will spend itself and be spent for its Master's honor. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." O Jesus, not as the world's followers give, do we desire to give to thee. They give their lives but once, we would "die daily;" they give much of their talent, we would give all. Take our heart, and seal it, make it as thine own, that we may live to thine honor, and die in thine arms, and sit upon thy throne with thee for ever and ever.

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