

Let the Peace of Christ Rule in Your Hearts

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the importance of receiving and letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and giving it away to others, in order to experience true peace and fellowship.

Scripture: Matthew 5:9, John 14:27, Romans 12:18, Philippians 4:7, Colossians 3:15

Topics: "Inner Peace", "Christian Community"

Description

Richard E. Bieber reflects on the story of Father Divine, a man who claimed to be the Messiah and offered a false sense of peace to his followers. In contrast, Jesus Christ left his disciples with true inner peace, a gift that surpasses worldly tranquility and is a source of power. Despite the challenges believers face, the peace of Christ is accessible through receiving it, allowing it to rule our hearts, and giving it away to others, fostering a community filled with genuine peace and forgiveness.

Transcript

Years ago, there was a man in Philadelphia who called himself Father Divine. (I think he spelled it "Devine" rather than "Divine," but I'm sure he wouldn't mind spelling his name in accordance with his real intentions.)

Father Divine was in touch with Sweet Daddy Grace, and Prophet Jones over there in Detroit. But Father Divine had a much bigger operation in Philadelphia. Father Divine, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways claimed to be the Messiah. "When I was here two thousand years ago..." he would say. Father Divine had a wife, whom he called his "Spotless Canadian Bride."

During the Great Depression, Father Divine fed hundreds and hundreds of hungry people by helping them to pool their resources. As his cult grew, Father Divine began buying hotels in Philadelphia and providing his followers with decent housing. The police reported that whenever Father Divine bought a hotel and moved in his followers, the crime rate would drop for blocks around that hotel.

While I was studying in Philadelphia, a friend of mine and I decided to attend one of Father Divine's Banquets. One Friday night we took the subway to the city center and approached a big old mansion on Broad Street, which was his main Heaven.

We rang the bell. A man answered the door who called himself the Angel Faith-Victory. "No Banquet here tonight," said Faith-Victory, "but at 1:00 a.m. at 16th and Oxford there will be a Banquet. If you wish to

come, I will meet you there."

1:00 a.m... we were met by Faith-Victory and ushered into a large banquet hall with a great U-shaped table, filled with people. Soon after we were seated at the table the food began to come, as the followers of Father Divine passed platters of every kind of meat, chicken, vegetables, rolls, bread, salad, ice cream. "Local" meant person to person. "Express" meant, "pass it across the person next to you." Never have I seen so much food as at that Banquet!

Every so often someone would say, "Peace, it's wonderful!" And everyone would respond with joy, "Peace, it's wonderful!"

Peace, it's wonderful! Peace, it's wonderful!

There were signs on the walls with the same message: "Peace, it's wonderful!"

Old Father Divine was on to something. He understood the yearning of the human heart for peace. And he imparted it to his followers:

A cult peace. A brainwashed peace. The peace of a false Christ.

When the Lord Jesus departed from his disciples for the last time, forty days after the resurrection, he left nothing tangible behind. No money in the bank. No writings. Not a scrap of writing from Jesus' hand! The only record we have of Jesus writing was when he wrote in the dirt, after they brought him a woman caught in adultery.

And yet, Jesus did give his followers something priceless, something that made them richer than all the riches earth could give: he gave them peace. Real peace.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

John 14:27

Not the peace of tranquil circumstances. Not the peace of earthly security. Inner peace. His peace --- which is more than a feeling or a mood. His peace is power, as when he said to the storm, "Peace! Be still!" and the wind died away, and the waves settled down. Or when he appeared before his followers in that room with the door shut, alive from the dead! His first words to them were, "Peace be with you!" and their hearts were flooded with the peace of heaven.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you."

But why is it that so many people who claim to follow Jesus don't seem to have that peace? Instead of peace within, we have worry, anxiety, resentment, fear, anger, self-pity. I'm not talking about people out there who have never tasted God's mercy, who have never met the Lord of Peace. I'm talking about believers who are trying to walk the walk. Who share in the word. Who commune with the Master in the bread and wine.

What happened to this promise? Where did it go? Why isn't his peace flooding our lives with the power of heaven? Why isn't it putting us to sleep at night and waking us to the new day with joy each morning?

This peace, which the Lord Jesus gives to all his disciples, including us, is not like a tranquilizer that gets into your blood stream and quiets you down. It's not Yoga Peace, or Soft Music Peace. It's not a mental state achieved through meditation and breathing exercises. The peace we're talking about comes from another world. From heaven. It's his peace.

This supernatural peace, which held the early believers through all their storms and trials, is a gift, a gift which we can have even now. A gift which we can keep for the rest of our lives. Here's how this gift becomes ours. It requires our cooperation in three steps. It's a rhythm we develop like walking or breathing.

You receive it.

You let it rule.

You give it away.

Receive it. Let it rule. Give it away. Continuously.

Receive it.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

The Lord Jesus lives in those words.

When we take those words into our hearts, he comes with them, and so does his peace.

Now we begin to breathe them in, just like we breathe the air. Until it becomes second nature. Until it becomes as natural to us as breathing.

"Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the gift of peace. I open my heart to continually receive it, as I walk through the turmoil of this world. Just as I keep drinking in the air to stay alive, I keep drinking in your peace to stay alive."

Let it rule.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in the one Body.

Colossians 3:15

We have two choices: our hearts can be ruled by this world's anxiety or by the Lord's peace. I can be in a Tizzy all the time, wondering what's going to happen next....how I'm going to beat the odds....how I'm going to survive the rat race; or I can let the Lord's peace rule me, trusting his peace to show me the way.

Here's how his peace rules us, if we allow it: Every time I start walking down a vanity side-track, his peace disappears. But when I turn and come back to where I know I need to be, his peace returns.

Every time I start badmouthing someone, his peace disappears. When I repent and get things right, his peace returns. When I walk around with an attitude against my brother, or when I pass judgment on my sister, I lose his peace. I know what I have to do to get it back.

So when I'm tempted to open my mouth and say something that I know will drive it away, I say to myself, "It's not worth it. I think I'll just keep my mouth shut."

When I'm inclined to walk down a path which I know is shrouded in shadows, I say to myself, "It's not worth it. I think I'll stay on this path." What a difference it makes, when I allow the peace of the Lord to rule my heart!

Give it away.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in the one Body.

Here in the Body is where we learn to give it away. And the more we give it away, the more we have it. The less we give it away, the less we have it. If we don't give it away, we lose it.

It has to be more than a liturgical ritual, "Peace be with you," as we move around the fellowship uttering these awesome words as if they were a password in our secret club. It's got to be a genuine gift of peace from my heart to yours. Holy peace. The peace of Christ!

Of course I cannot give it to you, unless I'm at peace with you. Nor can I bring the peace of Christ into the fellowship and give it away, unless my heart is at peace with everyone here. No grudges. No resentments. No attitudes. Forbearance. Forgiveness. Mercy, ruling my heart toward everybody --- no exceptions!

If my heart is truly at peace with you, I can give Christ's peace to you, whether I say the words, pray them or think them. The peace which passes all understanding flows out of my heart into yours....and from your heart into mine. And the more we give it away, the more we have, until our whole fellowship overflows with peace. Until the peace of the Lord Jesus fills our gathering place and spills out into the streets that surround it.

The more we give it away, the more we have it.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

The world in which you and I live is not at peace. It's a world of strife, tension, mistrust on every level. But we can live in this world, with all its turmoil, wrapped in a peace which passes all understanding. This peace is with us now as we read these words --- if we're thirsty enough to receive it, humble enough to let it rule us, and generous enough to keep giving it away ---

--- to each other

--- to our neighbors out there in the world

...as we serve God together.

"Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they shall be called sons and daughters of God."

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