

"THE PEACE OF GODLESSNESS OR THE PEACE OF GOD"

INTRODUCTION There are two places in the Scriptures where we have a picture of a man lying fast asleep in a boat in the middle of a raging storm.

The FIRST place is in the story of Jonah. Perhaps you remember the story. You may remember about the ship that Jonah took at the port of Joppa, bound for Tarshish, in order to escape from Jehovah and from the unpleasant duty that Jehovah had called upon him to perform in Ninevah; and how a terrible storm came upon the ship and the entire crew was in great fear. "But" says the storyteller, "Jonah was gone down into the inner parts of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." That was the scene on a large ship on the Mediterranean Sea.

And then in the GOSPELS we have something quite similar in a story of a storm that took place on the Sea of Galilee. It was a small fishing boat, manned by the disciples of Jesus who until recently had been fishermen themselves. Suddenly a storm sprang up, one of those little squalls that are very common on this little inland sea surrounded by hills. The fishermen were in great panic. "But" says Mark, "Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion"

The COMPARISON of these two pictures, and the CONTRAST between them gives us something to reflect upon here this morning. We may use them as parables of human life, as illustrating two very different kinds of mental tranquillity and peace. On the surface, of course, you see similarities in these two stories. For instance, in each of the two stories you have the man sleeping peacefully through the storm. In each of the two stories, you have the crew coming to waken him, asking how he can possibly lie there so calm through the danger of the terrible storm. These are the outward resemblances, the similarities. But then, as we go further in our comparison, we find that there is something of an inward difference. You see Jonah was at ease because he thought he had escaped from God. Whereas Jesus, on the other hand, was at peace because he was sure of God's love and care. It serves to remind us that there are two kinds of tranquillity - the tranquillity of unbelief and the tranquillity of faith. Or, if you will, there is the peace of Godlessness as over against the peace of God.

THE PEACE OF GODLESSNESS Let us, first of all, consider this peace of Godlessness suggested to us by Jonah's situation. This voyage that Jonah had embarked upon was a godless voyage. Remember, he had shaken off his responsibilities and had put God and duty and heroism and idealism and obligation out of his life for the time being. Having left the land of Israel, he was under the impression that he had left God behind too. His mind was now at ease. He doesn't care. He couldn't care less is his attitude and so he sleeps soundly.

It is true, is it not, that when God in Christ, comes into our lives, when he really comes, He does trouble us. Unfortunately, you and I know of people like Jonah, people who are quite successful in preserving their tranquillity by leaving out all of the pains of aspiration, all of the struggles and strivings after better things, all of the hard plodding of the path of duty, all of the pains of

pity and sympathy, all of the burden bearing which this sad world needs. They go on their way sleek and comfortable, with never a sleepless hour of the night for their own sins or their brother's needs. They are quite contented and happy and peaceful in the midst of this great spiritual drama of human life, though there is nothing in their hearts and lives but the world and self and getting and spending and comfort and pleasure. And there is nothing noble or beautiful or enviable about that kind of tranquillity.

Oh, I suppose, there are times when all of us are tempted to seek that kind of tranquillity. It's so easy in this world of ours to become engrossed in getting and spending and enjoying oneself, and so to go through life easy and happy in a shallow kind of way. There are times I suppose when all of us are tempted to run away from duty and responsibility like Jonah. But if there is anything divine in us at all (and there is some spark of the Divine in every one of us), then we can never find a very deep and lasting peace in that way. And I dare say that most of the people who seem to be absolutely contented with the world know in their own hearts that they have not found the secret of happiness and peace. Theirs is not a very deep peace, this peace of the world.

THE PEACE OF GOD

Consider now, in the second place, the peace of God as it is suggested to us by this picture of Jesus asleep in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. Part of the great appeal and charm of this story rests in the fact that it shows us the bearing and behavior of our Lord in a situation of real physical danger. Jesus was absolutely cool and calm and collected. As a matter of fact, we sense that he was somewhat surprised over the fear and panic of his disciples, surprised that men who professed to have some faith should lose all of the calm of their religion in a moment of danger. "Why are you afraid?" he asked them "Have you no faith". He had. He really believed in God, believed that they were all in God's keeping. So he possessed this measure of calmness and courage that comes from real faith in God.

And so it was throughout his entire life. He bore his own burdens and the burdens of a great many other people, but he bore them without worrying. He carried with him the peace of God. He was always recommending that way of facing life to the people around him. They had their worries, those common cares which are the same in all lands and in all centuries. And His message and His cure for worry was to have faith, to trust in God. Remember what he said to them on one occasion. "Oh you people of little faith. Do not worry with 'what shall we eat?' and 'what shall we drink?' and 'wherewithall shall we be clothed?' These are the things that the Gentiles seek, but your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. Seek first His Kingdom and all these things shall be added unto you". In other words, ~~he was actually telling these people, with all of their cares, not to worry, to stop worrying about their livelihood and bravely trust in God, and then they would have peace and leisure of mind to turn to the quest of God's kingdom.~~

Getting away from worrying and finding this peace of God. It's not the easiest thing I suppose for some of us to do. The early Christians somehow managed to do this. The Apostle Paul, in speaking to his friends at Philippi, had this to say:

"Do not worry about anything, but make your wants known to God by prayer and supplications with thanksgiving. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus"

In our day, as in Christ's day and in Paul's, most lives have plenty of troubles and cares. And I know that there is nothing on earth more difficult than to keep from worrying about them, to rise above anxiety into peace. But let us REALIZE that our Christianity ought to be teaching us something along this line. We ought to know something amid all of our cares, of what it is to trust in God and so to be kept in peace. It shouldN't be just anxious days and restless night. We should, like our Lord, be able to maintain our calmness and composure in the midst of the storms of life, because we, like him, are sure of God's love and care.

"Lord give me faith! - to live from day to day,
With tranquil heart to do my simple part,
And with my hand in thine, just go thy way.

Lord give me faith! - to trust, if not to know,
With quiet mind in all things Thee to find,
And child-like, go where Thou wouldst have me go.

Lord, give me faith! - to leave it all to Thee,
The future is thy gift, I would not lift
The veil Thy love has hung 'twixt it and me!"

LET US PRAY:

Here in thy presence, O God, let the stillness of this place speak to each one of of thy power and love. Take from our souls the strain and stress and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy peace. Amen