



SPEAK, LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING

John 14:27-31

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

John 14:27 [Jesus said:] “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be distressed or lacking in courage. 28 You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I am. 29 I have told you now before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe. 30 I will not speak with you much longer, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me, 31 but I am doing just what the Father commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Get up, let us go from here.”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The long speech in John 13/14-17 continues but the subject matter moves forward to peace, distress and the victory over the forces of evil.

KIND OF WRITING

Three approaches have dominated the critical conversation regarding the sources, structure and repetitions of the Farewell Discourse.

(i) The first, a more traditional approach, assumes that Jesus and his disciples did indeed depart the supper at 14:31 and that the speeches in John 15–17 were spoken as he and his disciples walked to the Garden of Gethsemane. The introduction to 18:1 (“After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out . . .”) calls this proposal seriously into doubt.

(ii) The second, advanced most thoroughly by Rudolf Bultmann but also by others, suggests that the repetitions and contradictions are the result of the displacement of the discourse at some stage in its composition and/or transmission.

The contents of the discourse must therefore be rearranged in order to return it to its original order. For example, Bultmann proposed that the original order of the discourse was 13:1–30; 17; 13:31–35; 15–16; 13:36–14:31. These proposals have not been widely accepted.

(iii) The third approach proposes that John 14–16 (or 13:31–16:33) contains two alternative versions of the Farewell Discourse. The repetitions and structure of the discourse are thus explained in terms of its redactional history. That is, John 14:1–31 preserves one version of Jesus’ farewell words to his disciples, John 15:1–16:33 a second. The call to depart in John 14:31 is viewed as the conclusion to the first discourse, which has been revised and added to in 15:1ff. This redactional approach is the consensus among recent Fourth Gospel scholars.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

(i) Peace or shalom enjoys a high profile in the Old Testament with a distinctive range of meanings: physical well-being, fertility in family and crops, good relations with others. See Psalm 122 for a really good exploration.

(ii) One of the most common phrases across the whole bible is “do not be afraid”. This is said to everyone who has an encounter with the transcendent. The Johannine form of this is “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Cf. Gen 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; 35:17; 43:23; 46:3; 50:19; Exod 14:13; 20:20; Num 21:34; Deut 7:18; Josh 10:25; 11:6; Ruth 3:11; 1 Sam 4:20; 12:20; 22:23; 23:17; 2 Sam 9:7; 13:28; 1 Kgs 17:13; 2 Kgs 1:15; 6:16; 19:6; 25:24; 1 Chr 22:13; 28:20; 2 Chr 32:7; Neh 4:14; Ps 49:16; Prov 3:25; Isa 10:24; 37:6; 41:10;

Thought for the day

There is a move afoot to replace church teaching on the just war with a more proactive doctrine of just peace. As Paul VI observed long ago, peace is much more than the absence of war. In a world riven by conflict, peace is a matter of discipleship and, at the personal level, a matter of deliberate choice even in the everyday conflicts of our ordinary lives. The prayer for peace goes well beyond praying for individualistic freedom from stress.

Prayer

O God, though the human race is divided by dissension and discord, yet we know that by testing us you change our hearts to prepare them for reconciliation. Even more, by your Spirit you move human hearts that enemies may speak to each other again, adversaries may join hands, and peoples seek to meet together. Amen.

Jer 1:8; 10:5; 40:9; 42:11; Ezek 2:6; Zech 8:13, 15; Tob 4:8, 21; 6:18; 12:17; Jdt 11:1; 1 Macc 3:22; 2 Esd 6:33; 10:55; Matt 1:20; 10:31; 14:27; 17:7; 28:5, 10; Mark 6:50; Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; 5:10; 12:7, 32; John 6:20; 12:15; Acts 18:9; 27:24; Rev 1:17. (*Pardon the completeness of the references, but it does make the point!*)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

Peace, in the New Testament, has a rich range of meanings, seen in the little chart overleaf.

Many themes across the Fourth Gospel are referenced here.

Peace

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage—I have conquered the world.” (John 16:33)

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the disciples had gathered together and locked the doors of the place because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace

be with you.” (John 20:19)

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. Just as the Father has sent me, I also send you.” (John 20:21)

Eight days later the disciples were again together in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” (John 20:26)

The Father is greater than I

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. The Word was with God in the beginning. (John 1:1–2)

But to all who have received him—those who believe in his name—he has given the right to become God’s children (John 1:12)

The Father and I are one.” (John 10:30)

But if I do them, even if you do not believe me, believe the deeds, so that you may come to know and understand that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” (John 10:38)

Jesus replied, “Have I been with you for so long, and you have not known me, Philip? The person who has seen me has seen the Father! How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father residing in me performs his miraculous deeds. (John 14:9–10)

Jesus replied, “Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (John 20:17)

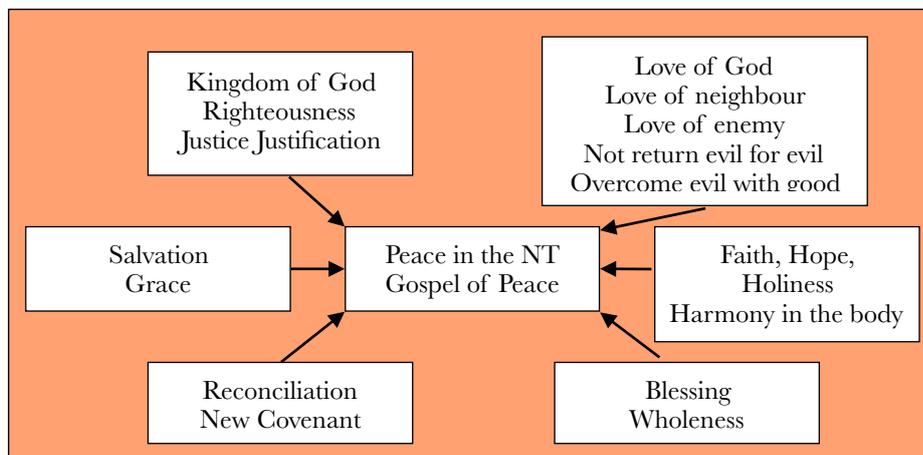
ST PAUL

To all those loved by God in Rome, called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! (Rom 1:7)

For the kingdom of God does not consist of food and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom 14:17)

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in him, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:13)

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice, set things right, be encouraged, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. (2



Cor 13:11)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:22–23)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 27 The special shalom or peace of the risen Lord includes freedom from death and freedom from the fear of death. See 14:1–7. In the biblical view, true peace—shalom—is enjoyed by those in continuing relationship with God. It is also not a private experience but forms part of what it means to be community. To leave here is not simply to signal departure but to bestow a bequest. Peace includes joy, of course.

Verse 28 The going points to death and resurrection—the ground of Christian joy (and peace). This Gospel teaches the equality of the Father and the Son and at the same time the priority of the Father (as the parent-child metaphor suggests). The Son obeys the Father and the verse here is not about metaphysics but about relationship. (Heretics, such as Arius, exploited this verse.) Jesus is *sent* by God, *obeys* his Father, and *returns* to the one who sent him. His “going away” is for their benefit and for the benefit of all humanity. The key verse again is John 13:3.

Verses 29–31a Here, the cosmic dimension of salvation is disclosed. V. 29 is an almost verbatim repetition of 13:19. Both verses affirm Jesus’ going away or lifting up reveals who God is. The powerlessness of the ruler of this world is contrasted in v. 31 with Jesus’ obedience to God’s commandment. God’s commandment is for Jesus to give eternal life to the world and is grounded in God’s love for the world (3:16–17). The contrast between the two antagonists in the cosmic battle could not be more clearly

drawn: the ruler of this world, who embodies everything that is opposed to God, and Jesus, the Son of God, whose actions demonstrate his love for God.

Verse 31b This little editorial glitch indicates a source. Cf. Mark 14:42.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Reflect on your own experience of longing for peace and/or arriving at peace. What brought you to the place you now find yourself? Have you found the peace “the world does not give?”
2. ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid’. When you have been anxious, who have been the Jesus people for you who were able to calm your anxiety. How did they do this? For whom have you been one who calmed anxiety?
3. Jesus prepares the disciples for the shock of his absence. All of our have experiences transitions like this, such as bereavement. What has my experience been and, more importantly, what has kept me going?
4. Evil is still around — in small things and great. We know in faith that evil does not have the last word, no matter what. What has your experience been?

PRAYER

Great and loving Father, your will for us in Jesus is the peace the world cannot give; your abiding gift is the Advocate he promised.

Calm all troubled hearts, dispel every fear. Keep us steadfast in love and faithful to your word, that we may always be your dwelling place.

Grant this through Jesus Christ, the first-born from the dead, who lives with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.