

The Secret of Abiding Peace

by
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*"Enoch walked with God;
then he was no more,
because God took him away."*

Genesis 5:24

Our subject is "The Secret of Abiding Peace. Abounding joy, and Abundant Victory in War Times and at All Times." You will find the text in Genesis 5:24, "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." In the description of Enoch's walk given in our text, we find the secret of abiding peace, abounding joy, and abundant victory in war times and at all times. To my mind, the text is one of the most fascinating and thrilling verses in the entire Bible. It sounds more like a song from a heavenly world than a plain statement of historical facts regarding a humble inhabitant of this world of ours, but such it is, and it is possible for each one of us to so live and act that it may be recorded of us, "He walked with God," and later, "then he was no more, because God took him away."

The position of this verse in the Bible is significant and suggestive. There has been, in the verses immediately preceding, a very ordinary, commonplace, and, at first sight, long recital of how one man after another of the olden time lived so many years, fathered a son, continued to live so many years, and fathered other sons and daughters, and then died. Then suddenly Enoch is introduced and the story begins just as the other stories begin and goes on just as the other stories go on, and seems about to end just as the other stories end, but, no, there is this fresh breath from heaven and these melodious tones sound out: "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." Then the story goes on again in the same old strain. Remember that this account belongs to a far-away time, thousands of years before Christ, and about a thousand years before the Flood, and yet what depth of truth and beauty there is in it. Are there not lessons for us to learn from that far, far-away olden time?

The entire authentic history of Enoch is contained in nine verses in the Bible, six in the Old Testament, three in the New. History outside of the Bible is utterly unacquainted with him, yet he stands out as one of the most remarkable and admirable men of whom history speaks, a man whom God honored as He has honored but one other member of the entire race. Enoch's greatness was the kind that pleases God. We are told in the 11th chapter of Hebrews and the fifth

verse that "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God." Quite likely his greatness did not win very hearty commendation from his contemporaries. However, that was not of much consequence. His greatness did not consist of military renown, political power, profound scholarship, successful statesmanship, splendid artistic or architectural genius, or even of magnificent philanthropic achievement. It was greatness of a more quiet and less pretentious and visible nature, but of a far more real and lasting nature; it was greatness of character. "He walked with God," and God so enjoyed his fellowship that He took Enoch to be with Himself permanently.

I wish to make clear to you all three things: first, what it is to walk with God; second, what are some of the results of walking with God; third, how we may get into such a walk ourselves.

I. What It Is to Walk with God

First of all, I think I may safely say that for some of us here this morning that question needs no answer. God Himself has answered it to us in blessed, unspeakably blessed, experience. But for others of us--yes, many of us--it does need an answer. We have read the words of the text before; perhaps we have read them often. They have charmed us, soothed us, thrilled us, and yet often the question has arisen in our hearts, just what do they mean?

This question receives a very plain and simple answer:

To walk with God means to live one's life in the consciousness of God's presence and in conscious communion with Him, to have the thought constantly before us, "God is beside me," and every now and then to be speaking to Him, and, still more, listening for Him to speak to us. In a word, to walk with God is to live in the real, constant, conscious companionship of God.

We read that Enoch walked with God, not on a few rare occasions of spiritual exaltation, such perhaps as most of us have known, but for three hundred consecutive years after the birth of Methuselah (Genesis 6:22). It is possible for us to have this consciousness of the nearness and fellowship of God in our daily life, to talk with Him as we talk with an earthly friend; yes, as we talk with no earthly friend, and to have Him talk to us, and to commune with Him in a silence that is far more meaningful than any words could be. I would gladly linger here in this sweet and holy place, but let us pass on to the results of walking with God.

II. The Results of Walking with God

1. The first result of walking with God is great joy, abounding joy. "In Your presence," sings the Psalmist, "You will fill me with joy" (Psalm 16:11).

There is no greater joy than that which comes from right companionship. Who would not rather live in a hut with congenial companions than in a palace with disagreeable associates? Who would not rather live on a bleak and barren isle among real Christians than in the fairest land the sun ever shone upon among infidels, blasphemers, drunkards, hoodlums, and the sexually immoral? The most attractive feature of heaven is its society, especially the society of God and the Lord Jesus. Samuel Rutherford said: "I would rather be in hell with Christ than in heaven without Christ: for if I were in hell with Christ that would be heaven to me, and if I were in heaven without Christ that would be hell to me." But when we have the conscious presence and companionship of God on earth, "we have two heavens, the heaven to which we are going and a heaven to go to heaven in." In one of the loneliest hours of His lonely life, Jesus looked up with radiant joy and said, "Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me" (John 6:32).

Can you remember some ecstatic hour of your life when you walked, and sometimes talked and sometimes were silent, with an earthly companion whom you loved as you loved no other? Oh, happy hour! but only faintly suggestive of the rapture that comes from walking with God, for He is an infinitely dearer and better and more glorious companion than any earthly one could be. How the homely details of everyday life are transfigured if we have the constant fellowship of God in them. There lived in the Middle Ages a lad named Nicholas Hermann. He was a raw, awkward youth, breaking all things that he touched, but one day the thought was brought to his mind with great force that God was everywhere and that he might have the constant thought of God's presence with him and do all things to God's glory. This thought transformed his life. He soon took a job where his duty was of the most menial character--in the kitchen, washing pots and kettles, but, to use his own way of putting it, he "practiced the presence of God" in the midst of his humble toil. That kitchen became so holy a place that men took long journeys to meet Nicholas Hermann and to converse with him.

2. The second result of walking with God is a great sense of security, of abiding peace.

In the Psalm already quoted the Psalmist sings again: "I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (16:8). Certainly not. How can we be moved if God is with us? What harm can befall us?

How often God says to His servants as they begin to tremble before approaching danger: "Do not fear, for I am with you" (Isaiah 41:10). How safe the trusting child feels with father or mother by its side. A little girl was once playing in a room below while her mother was above, busy about household duties. Every little while the child would come to the foot of the stairs and call up: "Mamma, are you there?" "Yes, darling, what is it?" "Nothing, I only wanted to know if you were there." Then again a little while: "Mamma, are you there?" "Yes, darling, what is it?" "Nothing, I only wanted to know if you were there." Ah! is not that all we want to know, that God is here, right here by our side?

There may be plagues, there may be war, there may be famine, there may be thugs on the street, there may be burglars in the house, there may be houses of sin, and unprincipled men and women on every hand; yes, our wrestling may not be with flesh and blood but "but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms," but what does it matter? God is with us. Oh, if only we bore in mind at every moment the thought of His presence with us, if only we could hear Him saying, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand," there would never be one single bit of fear in our hearts under any circumstances.

No matter how the war increases, no matter how near it may come to our own doors, there would be unruffled calm, abounding peace. We could constantly say, under all circumstances, "The LORD is my light and my salvation--whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life--of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident." No wonder the Psalmist wrote in this connection, "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple." The conscious companionship of God is the great secret of abiding peace.

3. The third result of walking with God is spiritual enlightenment.

Communion with God rather than scholarship opens to us the mind and thought of God. There is no hint that Enoch was a man of science or letters. I am very sure he was not a higher critic, and yet this plain man by walking with God and talking with God got such an insight into the purposes of God as no other man of his time had. In the Epistle of Jude, the 14th and 15th verses, we learn that even in that far-away day, a thousand years before the flood, Enoch got hold of the great truth of the second coming of Christ. So today some old washerwoman, or

some humble cobbler, who walks with God may know more of the mind of God than many an eminent college professor, or even a professor in a theological seminary. The important question concerning points in dispute in religion and spiritual life is not, what do the scholars say, but what do the men and women who walk with God say.

If one is considering going to some one for spiritual instruction, the first question is not how much of a scholar he is, not how much does he know of Latin and Hebrew and Greek and Syriac and philosophy and psychology, but does he walk with God? This is the great condition of spiritual insight, wisdom, and understanding.

4. The fourth result of walking with God is purity of heart and life.

Nothing else is so cleansing as the consciousness of God's presence. Things that we have long tolerated become intolerable when we bring them into the white light of the presence of the Holy One. How many things we do in the darkness of the night, yes, even in the broad light of day, that we could not for a moment think of doing if we realized God was right there by our side looking. Many deeds we now do would be left undone if we realized this. Many words we now speak would be left unspoken, many thoughts and fancies we now cherish would be speedily banished. There are certain things that we do in the absence of certain holy friends that we would not for a moment do in their presence, but God is always present, whether we know it or not, and if we walk in the consciousness of His presence, if we walk with God, our lives and hearts will speedily whiten.

I have a friend who in his early life, though he professed to be a Christian, was very profane. He tried hard to overcome his profanity, but failed. He felt he must give up his attempt to be a Christian, but one day a wise Christian to whom he appealed for help, said to him, "Would you swear if your father were present?" "No." "Well, when you go to your work tomorrow, remember that God is with you every moment. Keep the thought of God's presence with you." At the end of the day, to his amazement, he had not sworn once. He had had the thought of God with him through the day and he could not be profane in that presence. The consciousness of the presence of God will keep us from doing all the things that we would not dream of doing in His presence. Herein lies the secret of a holy life.

5. The next result of walking with God is closely akin to this, beauty of character.

We become like those with whom we habitually associate. How like their parents children become. How many mothers and fathers have been startled by seeing their own imperfections and follies mirrored in their children. Husband and wife grow strangely like one another, thus also the one who associates with God

becomes like God. If we walk with God, more and more will His beauty illumine and reflect itself in our lives. Moses' very face shone as he came down from the forty days and forty nights of conversation with God. So will our whole life soon shine with a heavenly glow and glory if we habitually walk with God. "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

6. The next result of walking with God will be eminent usefulness.

Our lives may be quiet and even obscure; it may be impossible to point to what men call great achievement, but the highest usefulness lies not in such things but in the silent, almost unnoticed but potent and pervasive influence of a holy life, whose light illumines, whose beauty compliments, and whose nobility elevates all who come in contact with it. Enoch has produced immeasurably more good for man than Nebuchadnezzar, who built the marvelous structures of Babylon, than Augustus who "found Rome brick and left it marble," than the Egyptian monarchs who built the pyramids to amaze and mystify the world for thousands of years to come; and today the man or woman, no matter how humble or obscure, who walks with God is accomplishing more for God and man than Morse with his telegraph, Fulton with his steamboat, Stevenson with his locomotive, Cyrus Field with his Atlantic cable, Roebling with his marvelous bridges, Marconi with his wireless telegraphy and telephony, Edison and Tesla with their electric and electrifying discoveries, or any of the renowned political reformers of the day, with all their futile schemes for turning this world into a terrestrial paradise. Friends, if you wish to be really, permanently, eternally useful, walk with God.

7. But there is a still better result than this from walking with God--we please God. Before his translation Enoch had this testimony borne to him, that he "was commended as one who pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5). This is more than being useful. God wants our company, God wants us to walk with Him, and He is well pleased when we do. God is more concerned that we walk with Him than that we work for Him. Martha was taken up with her service for her Lord, but Mary was taken up with her Lord Himself, and He testified that Mary had chosen the better part. It is quite possible today to be so occupied with our work for God that we forget Him for whom we work. If we would please Him, we should first see to it that we walk with him.

8. There is one result of walking with God still left to be mentioned, that is, God's eternal companionship. "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." The man who walks on earth with God, God will sooner or later take to be with Himself forever. "Whoever serves me," says Christ, "must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be." If we do not walk with God on earth, we are not likely to live with God in heaven. If we do not care to

cultivate His society now, we may be sure that He will not take us to be in His society forever.

III. How to Enter into a Walk with God

These eight immeasurably precious results come from walking with God: abounding joy, abiding peace, spiritual enlightenment, purity of heart and life, beauty of character, eminent usefulness, pleasing God, God's eternal companionship. Do we not all then long to walk with Him? To come then face to face with the great practical question, what must we do that we ourselves may enter into this joyous, blessed walk with Him? The question can be plainly and simply answered.

1. First of all, we must trust in the atoning blood of Christ. "By faith," the record reads, "Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death" (Hebrews 11:5). Comparing this with what is said immediately before about Abel, we see that the faith by which he pleased God and was translated was faith in what God said about the blood. God is holy and we are sinners. Sin separates, as a deep and impassable gorge between us and Him. There can be no walk with Him until sin is put away and the gorge thus bridged, and it is the blood, and the blood alone, that puts away sin (Hebrews 9:22). It is vain for us to attempt to cultivate the presence of God until we have accepted the provision that God Himself has made for putting away sin from between us and Himself. Indeed, if we have any real thought of God's holiness and our sinfulness there could be no joy, but only agony, in fellowship with Him, unless our sin was covered up, washed away, blotted out by the blood. There are many today who are spurning the blood and still attempting to walk with God. Vain attempt! It is utterly impossible.

2. If we would walk with God, we must obey God. Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). Obedience to God, absolute surrender to His will, is necessary if we are to walk with Him. We cannot walk with God unless we go His way. Two cannot walk together unless they be agreed (Amos 3:3). There are many who once knew the presence of God every day and every hour. They know it no longer. The old and heavenly joy has faded from their lives. They wonder why it is. Ah! there is no mystery--disobedience. Come back, get right with God, surrender again and absolutely to His will.

There is but one thing more to say. If we would walk with God, we must cultivate the thought of His presence. As Nicholas Hermann, or Brother Lawrence, put it, we must "practice the presence of God" constantly. Call to

mind the fact that God is with you when you are about your work. Often say to yourself, "God is with me." When you lie down at night say, "God is with me." If you wake at night, remember "God is here with me." So in all the relations and experiences of life.

There are four great aids to this:

(1) First, *the study of God's Word*. When we open this Book we realize, or ought to realize, that God Himself is speaking to us.

(2) Second, *prayer*. In prayer we come face to face with God.

(3) Third, *thanksgiving*. In intelligent and specific thanksgiving to God He is more real to us than even in petition.

(4) Fourth, *worship*. In worship we bow before God and contemplate Him. Oh, how near He gets at such a time.

It is the Holy Spirit who will make our walk with God true and real. It is in connection with the coming of the Spirit that Christ speaks of His own manifestation of Himself to us and of the coming of the Father and of Himself to be with us (John 14:16, 17, 18, 21, 23). Look, then, to God Himself by His Spirit to make His presence known and felt.

Brethren, shall we walk with God? God is saying to each of us today, "Come, take a walk with me." If we accept the wondrous invitation He will lead us on as long as we will let Him, and some day it will be true of us, as some one has quaintly said of Enoch, we will walk so far with God that we will not come back, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

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