

# Peace Beyond Compare

*That You May Believe*

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**Bible Text:** John 14:27-31; Numbers 6:24-26  
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Turn your Bibles open at John 14. Probably there is no document outside of the Constitution of the United States that has had such a prevailing influence on these United States than George Washington's farewell address to the American people. It is a classic, but it's not only a classic of literature, it is a classic in terms of political legacy to a nation. Here was this man whose position in the history of these newly United States, had been so determinative of its future. People could not imagine, they could not imagine a country without Washington at its head; a man who had denied and declined attempts to give him more authority than that granted to him by the Constitution; a man who had kept himself above the internecine warfare going on between Hamilton and Jefferson, two of his own men; a man who had sacrificed his home and his family over years of warfare. No one in the history of the government of these United States set a greater example of leadership, sacrifice, and utter service to his country, and he served his country to the best of his ability when he retired from office, thereby setting the example to the nation that its highest office should only be ideally two terms. George, what's his name? Somebody else whose name has just gone from my mind which is why you should never free wheel in the pulpit. Reagan wanted another term but he knew that that wasn't going to happen.

Well, George Washington's farewell is absolutely vital and we need to revisit it again and again and read what he said in that in terms of understanding our country and understanding what is wrong with our country today. But that farewell, of course, pales into insignificance next to the farewell that we've been studying in John's Gospel, this farewell by Jesus to his people. Washington understood that the legacy he left to his people was the legacy of his own character, outstanding character; his own practice; his careful articulation of the principles of government; his determination to stick to that Constitution that had been devised by the representatives of the people; his longing that these states would remain united. But he could not enforce his legacy. The spirit of George Washington died when George Washington died. But in this great farewell of Jesus to his people, he is intimating that when he goes, when he leaves them, by resurrection and exaltation to his Father, his Spirit, his Holy Spirit, will be the gift that he leaves to the church. That has been occupying us now for several weeks and it reached its climax when he tells us in verse 26, "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." He's talking to the apostles, to the men in that room. They are going to

have this extraordinary anointing by the Holy Spirit to recall all that Jesus has taught; not only to recall it, but to understand it in a way that they had not understood it while he was with them. They will be the founding fathers of the church. They will give to the church the founding documents inspired by Jesus, communicated, breathed out by the Spirit, and written by those duly authorized and empowered by the Spirit to give us the word of God.

So that's where we've come to so far but there is more to his legacy than the Spirit because, secondly, he leaves these apostles and us his peace. We see that in verse 27, "Peace I leave with you." The language of leaving is the language of legacy. It's the language of bequeathing something. He is bequeathing his peace as a gift to his people. Peace is one of the great big words of Judaism, shalom. It is both a greeting and a farewell, and here his use of the word "peace," is a farewell use. Later on after the resurrection, he will come back to his disciples and his first words to them, alive after his passion, his first words to them will be, "Peace to you. Be at peace. Have my peace." But here he's leaving. We have to put ourselves now as we read this tonight, not where we are after the resurrection, but where they are before the resurrection in that upper room or we misunderstand much of what is said in this farewell speech of Jesus. He is bequeathing to them his peace. Now, I said this would "peace" is a word that's used in Judaism to this day, shalom, on the lips of the average person, the word "shalom" is a wish or a courtesy, but Jesus is able to give us what he wishes for us. He leaves it, he leaves his peace as a legacy to the church.

Now, this word "peace" here in the context of John's Gospel, picks up the messianic end times ideas found in the Old Testament. The very heart of the worship, the liturgy of the Jewish church, is the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6, "Thus you shall bless the people of Israel and you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." That was one of the most significant benedictions that you find in the Bible, and structurally there is much about the Aaronic blessing that we need to understand from the Hebrew. If you were to take the words "Lord" out of the original Hebrew, you would be left with 12 words, 12 words representing the 12 tribes of Israel. You could say all of those 12 words with only one use of the word "Lord," but the word "Lord" is inserted three times into that blessing to remind us that the Lord is around and in the center of the blessing that he bestows on his people. He is the source of peace. He is the source of goodness. He is the source of blessing to the church.

And at the forefront of the blessings in that great benediction is peace. Peace more than merely the absence of war, it is at the summit of the blessings that his people will see when ultimately they see, what Calvin calls, the serene countenance of God. They see God in his splendor and glory. That has always been the great goal and joy and anticipation and expectation and hope of the church whether the Jewish church or the Christian church. We have always looked, the people of God in both dispensations have always looked for that end time blessing of peace on that day when God would fulfill his promises.

Now, here those men are, you see, they're in the upper room and they have God with them, they have God incarnate, God with skin on, there with them in that upper room bequeathing them, giving them his peace. He is poised, as he said over and over again in this chapter, he is poised to go on the journey to the cross. He is going to fight for the peace that he bequeaths to them. He is going to wrestle with the powers of darkness. He is going to feel the onslaught of the powers of violence in order to secure the very peace that he is going to give them as a legacy on the basis of his death and cross work, and it's his submission to that work that is the foundation for this permanent blessing of peace. This is what Isaiah is referring to in Isaiah 40:1-2 when he says, when he announces the good news that warfare has ceased. God has come to bring the permanent blessing of a right relationship with himself, true peace, with all hostilities at an end, with blessing freely and fully given to his people. He has come to give that to those who have been pardoned from their sins for Jesus' sake. We're going to gather around the Lord's table in a moment and round that table we will be reminding ourselves that all of our hopes for salvation rest upon the tearing of his flesh and the outpouring of his blood. Jesus did it all therefore since we have been justified by faith in what Jesus has accomplished, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So he is making clear blue water, as it were, between anything that the world has on offer. Notice what he goes on to say, "My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives to you." The world in which Jesus spoke and that which later New Testament writers spoke was, of course, a world that knew something about peace. The first century world dominated by the Romans, knew the Pax Romana, the Roman peace secured by the Emperor Augustus, maintained by military might; the strong iron-clenched fist of Rome preserved it. But the people also knew that that peace was tentative, it was temporary; it could be destroyed by circumstances. Those pesky Scotsman, for example, could destroy the Roman peace whenever they went too far north. The wild German tribes could destroy that peace if they invaded the Empire. All human attempts at securing peace between people or between nations are at the mercy of insipid hatred, anxiety, bitterness, selfishness, greed, malice, and fear.

And the Scriptures, the Old Testament, is equally scathing at those who try to manufacture a peace apart from God. There were those prophets and those priests in the old covenant who would deceive the people; who would tell the people everything was all right when everything wasn't all right. They would say, "Peace! Peace!" when there was no peace. And the prophets of God were sent to speak against these false prophets who were, "healing the hurt of my people lightly," as God said. Who were kind of covering over the cracks with an amalgam of nothing that was substantial in order to cover up the basic and fundamental needs of men and women that needed a fundamental cure, the pardon of God, peace with God, that only God could give.

So Jesus makes clear this is not the kind of peace the world talks about. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives to you do I give to you." This is very important. Jesus' solution is not to extract them from danger. It's not to beam them up out of trouble. Jesus' solution is to give them peace in the circumstances. He's about to show them by his own example that he is able of composure and faithfulness in the midst

of intimidation and persecution and even pain and death. Jesus' peace is different from the world's peace because he has come to do this work of absorbing in himself all the causes of un-peace in the world: the malice of others; the sin of the world; and the wrath of God.

Now, we need to remind ourselves tonight when we read these words that our problem goes so far back and goes so deeply in that we are at war with God and therefore there is an un-settledness, an un-settledness in our relationship to God and that spins off to a basic and fundamental un-settledness and dis-ease within our own hearts and within our own spirits. That inner dis-ease to which we give various labels throughout our lives, that inner fundamental dis-ease comes from our alienation from God, and without this peace of Christ, this peace that Christ offers in the Gospel, we have every right to be afraid of God. Every right to be afraid of God, and yet it is the good news of the Gospel that Christ has taken our place; he has carried our load of debt; he has endured the wrath and hostility of God against us; he has won us. Peace with God through his work on the cross.

But it's not only peace with God, this peace implies, it is also the peace of God that passes all understanding. For the second time in this section, he immediately is speaking about peace, goes on to say this, "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." He's recalling a famous farewell that pre-dated his, the farewell of Moses to the children of Israel, and he's reminding himself and he's reminding those who are with him of the fact that these men who are with him in the upper room are human like us; they were going to show cowardice, fear, and anxiety. He's realistic about his people's capacity to stand up under pressure. He knows that sometimes his people find themselves in a dark place against a brick wall, between a rock and a hard place, and they feel sometimes they cannot go on.

Maybe you are here this evening and that's exactly where you are. You are struggling with the circumstances of life; with the pressures of life; with the issues that life is throwing up, and you feel desperate tonight. Desperate. You're not in despair yet but you're feeling desperate because you wonder how you can do this. Jesus comes to us tonight and he gives us this legacy of peace. Because we know him, it is possible to have peace in the circumstances, not because we are extracted out of the circumstances, but because the peace of God can settle our hearts in the circumstances of life, and we can face everything that is thrown at us if we find our security and our peace in him and not in the things. That's the thing about circumstances, circumstances are the things that stand around us; they are outside of us. The peace of God dwells within us, that is in our hearts, and with that peace of God dwelling in our hearts, circumstances are things that we can take or leave because that's where our security and stability come from.

Now, how does he give us his peace? Well, he gives us his peace by giving us his word, so it flows seamlessly, really, from this legacy of peace to him beginning to give us some assurances. So the flow of the passage from verse 15 is this: he gives us his Spirit to teach us; he gives us his peace to secure us; and he gives us his word to assure us. Jesus says some things to them now so that their faith will stand. Now, we read about it and we think he's talking to them but indirectly he's speaking to us because what he did for them

we can be sure he will do for us by extension, and I'll explain that in a moment. He says some things to them then so that their faith will stand. Once again, he prophesies to them, he gives them his word about his own future, "You have heard me say to you," he goes on to say, "I am going away, and I will come to you." So this is what he has been teaching them. "I'm going away but I'm going to come back to you." What does he mean by that? He means he's going to be arrested, crucified, dead and buried, but on day three, he is going to come back to them. That was him prophesying before he went there. They had that promise. What they did with that promise, brothers and sisters, I don't know what they did with that promise. I think they shelved it somewhere. They put it into a dust jacket somewhere and they put it on the shelves and they left it there and they never took it down and reread it or remembered it or encouraged one another to read it. Thankfully, it's all in the Bible now and we can read it for ourselves. But he gives them the promise, "I'm going away. I will come to you."

Now, you see, as they look back, as John looks back from the vantage point of when he's writing his Gospel, that promise of Jesus came true. As we read this tonight 2,000 years on, that promise of Jesus came true. Jesus' word is truth. It's assurance, confidence building. We can go back to this and say, "Well, he did it for them. He kept his word for them. He'll surely keep his word to me." That's the importance of this.

Now, he goes on to say more than this, "If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to my Father, and the Father is greater than I." The disciples heard what he said and it did not compute. They were still thinking about themselves and their loss. But if they thought about it for a moment and then connected the dots between what Jesus had been saying, they would have understood that Jesus going back to where he had come from, going back to the Father, his Father, that would be good for Jesus. That would be a good thing. If they had been listening very closely, they would have remembered what he had taught them there in chapter 13 when he washed their feet, he left his place, he washed their feet, poured out the water, cleansed their feet and then resumed his place. They would've seen that what he was really doing is completing the task. He had come from God and he was returning to God. John got that point. He knew that that's what Jesus knew he was doing. He tells us in John 13:1, Jesus knew that he had come from God and was going back to God. That was part of the package, and that going back to God was good for Jesus. It was right for Jesus. He was returning to where he was going.

Now, the Apostle Paul, after the resurrection, of course, gets that point and he applies it to us. He applies it to us because for now, from now on, you see, for you and me, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. To depart here is to go there. There is a seamless transition, the Spirit as it leaves the body is immediately in the presence, in the immediate presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. So he understood that, and he's already been teaching them that if he goes to the Father, then they get this other gift, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will be with them all the time and will be in them all the time. They'll never be without him. While he was on earth, there were days when he was there and they were there, and they were without him for a few hours perhaps or perhaps a couple of days, but when the Spirit came, they would never be without him, the Spirit of

glory and of God would rest and would remain with them in their lives. It would be better for them that his departure would ensure that one day he would take them to be with him. He spelled that out earlier on in the chapter, "I'm going to prepare a place for you and I will come again." This is at the end of history. He will come again and take us to be with him where he is.

So what does he say? He says, "It's better that I go away because I'm going to the Father, the Father is greater than I." He's reminding them of where they are standing in the history of redemption. Where are they? They are immediately before the crucifixion and the burial and the resurrection. They are there with Jesus in the upper room. He has already given the ontological argument. He's already explained to them that in terms of being, "I and the Father are one." There is absolute equality and unity within the Godhead. But he is still with them, do you see the point of this section and what he says? It's all about him going back to the Father. "I'm going to the Father for the Father is greater than I am." He's not saying, "The Father has more God-hood in him than I have or more power in him than I have," but at that stage, you see, he is still there before them in his humiliation, in his dissent, in his humanity, pre-the cross, pre-the resurrection, and he's saying to them, "It's time for me to go back to resume my place."

He'll make this perfectly clear in chapter 17, verse 5, when he says to the Father, "Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you before the world was." He hadn't stopped being God, he hadn't stopped being the second person of the holy Trinity, but he had put aside the glory; he had put aside the manifestation of his superiority and his deity, and he had manifested himself in human likeness. And he's going to resume his glory, resume his glory as deity, as God. He's going to resume his place at the right hand of the Father on high, exalted with all power and authority, and the Spirit will be given by the Father and the Son to the church when Christ is exalted.

So he is reassuring them. He is giving them his word, and he confirms this. You notice how he goes on to confirm this, verse 29, "And I have told you this before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe." He's thinking of those men, "So that when I come back to you after the resurrection, you'll know. So that when I return to my Father and the Spirit comes at Pentecost, you'll know. You'll know and you'll believe me. You'll believe my word. I'm doing it for your sake." And by extension for our sakes because he kept his word to them and returned for those six weeks of resurrection appearances. Because he ascended to heaven and the Spirit came at Pentecost, then you and I believe too. We believe on the basis of his word.

I mean, if you just do a real quick run through of chapters 13 and 14 and, indeed, right through this last farewell, you'll find that Jesus is always going back to this. He's always saying things like 13:7, "You don't realize now what I'm doing but you will understand later." Or 13:19, "I'm telling you now before it happens so that when it does happen you'll believe that I am he." Or in chapter 16, verse 4, "I have told you this now so that when the time comes you'll remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you. There are things that I'm telling you now that I didn't tell you then because I was there then, but I'm going away now and so this will happen." Or in 16:25, "Though

I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. There is going to be a shift in the historical redemptive program where things will change. When I have returned, finish the work, returning to the Father and the Spirit comes in his power, that will mark a new era. We're not there yet," he says to those men, whereas we reading it know we are there now. "But in that new era, things will become plain to you. The Holy Spirit will make them plain." How was he going to make them plain? He was going to make it plain by giving them the complete Bible of Old and New Testament; the apostolic word along with the prophetic word that becomes the foundation for the church of God going forward in the world.

Look at verse 30. He leaves them his peace. He gives them his word. He assures them of his victory. "I will no longer talk much with you." He's talking to those men in that upper room. There they are having this long conversation, it's gone on for some time; we just have a precis of it, a summary of it here. "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as my Father commanded me, so that the world will know that I love the Father." He's thinking of what? He's thinking of the arrest and the outcome; they are lying heavily on his mind as he speaks to his disciples. He knows he does not have much time left. He knows that Judas is gone. Judas is making his way with perhaps between 500 or 1,000 men coming towards where they are. Judas has worked out that by the time he finds Jesus he won't be in the upper room any longer and he'll go looking for him, places where he knows he can find him. But Jesus knows there's more than just Judas on the way, the prince of darkness is coming. The powers of hell are being unleashed. The prince of the power of the air is going to come upon the scene and he's going to look as if he's won the day by the next morning, by the next mid-day, and our Lord wants these men to know what's coming. The enemy is at the door. The ruler of this world is on his way, marked by Judas and these men, but be sure behind them is this serpent that was there in the garden of Eden, come to do his worst on God's Messiah. The enemy is at the door.

I want to read these words to you again: the ruler of this world is coming. This is what we are involved in. We sit in this room this evening and we look around and we see these physical bodies in this room and we do not see the spiritual battle that is going on all around us. The spiritual battle that is going on all through this great city of Philadelphia. The angels of God against the demons of hell. The powers of darkness battling it out over the souls of men and women. We don't see the powers or the authorities that are battling it out over this great nation of the United States, battling it out in the invisible realm, in the invisible war that is going on all the time. Brothers and sisters, we are wrestling not against flesh and blood, we are wrestling against those principalities and powers, those evil forces of darkness in the highest places. The ruler of this world is coming. Jesus is spelling it out. There is this power struggle. These kingdoms that are at war one with the other, this invisible war, is about to become visible on that cross at Calvary as the Son of God is pinned to that cross, nailed to the cross. The prince of darkness is coming, dragging along with him his hellish weapons: betrayal, denial, desertion, injustice, violence, cruelty, death.

The prince of this world is coming. Perhaps as he said that they remembered what he said the day before. "Now is the judgment of this world, now will the ruler of this world be cast out." The devil's doom is sure. And why is it sure? Look at what he goes on to say, "The ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me." There is a double negative there in the Greek, it's emphatic: he does not have anything on me at all; there is nothing nothing that he has on me. The language has legal overtones to it. It means literally, "He has no legal claim or hold on me."

Let me tell you, brothers and sisters, this evening every one of us in this room cannot say that. Not one of us can say that. The devil has a lot on you. He has a lot on me. The devil has a whole library of assorted documents in which he has documented everything that he has on you and me, but he had nothing that he could bring to God and hold against Jesus. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. When Satan had confronted him, do you remember there in the desert, Jesus had resisted him. In the way that Israel had failed, he succeeded, he resisted him by the very word of God, from Deuteronomy there in the desert. When they came, the crowds came in Nazareth wanting to make him a king, replicating the very offer that Satan had made to him there in the desert, when they came to make him a king, Jesus made his way surreptitiously through the crowd, disappearing and avoiding that. He had always done the Father's will and in doing the Father's will, he had resisted the devil. "He has no claim on me." Why? Because verse 31, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father." He stands out. You and I are called to love the Father, he is able to say, "The world will know that I love the Father."

How does the world know that Jesus loved the Father? Because he says, "I do whatever the Father commanded me." The act of obedience of Jesus' life is the demonstration of his love to the Father and the demonstration that the devil has nothing on him. And the Father had commanded him to lay down his life in order that he might take it again because the rule of heaven is that no one has ascended into heaven but he who has descended from heaven. And Jesus was made for a little while lower than the angels, learning obedience by what he suffered, obeying the Father's voice, and the devil had nothing on him.

And as we see him later arrested out of hours, unjustly tried during the night, sentenced, driven through the streets of Jerusalem as a condemned man, eventually nailed to a cross, the world will know. It will know if it wants to know. It will know in spite of itself, that this is the way God has plan to overcome the evil one. Not by matching force with force. Not with a display of divine pyrotechnics but by humiliation, suffering, death, by the power of his love, Jesus' love for the Father, and the Father's love for the world. That's what Jesus has come to do. "The world will know that I love the Father. They will see me demonstrating that I love the Father."

You know, there's nothing like a demonstration of love, is there? Even at a very animal, human level. In Edinburgh there is a famous statue of a little Skye Terrier called Greyfriars Bobby. Greyfriars Bobby traveled to Edinburgh in 1865 from the farm where he lived with a man called John Gray, the shepherd who looked after him. John Gray was



a very sick man. He died of pneumonia on that visit to Edinburgh and they buried him in the city in Greyfriars Churchyard and the little dog started to sleep on his grave. The farmer came from the village way outside of the city, he came to the city and took the little doggie back to the farm eight miles outside Edinburgh, but Bobby found his way straight back to the city. For 14 years he slept every night on John Gray's grave and when the city authorities introduced dog licenses and a license fee had to be paid, the question was raised about Bobby. Should Bobby be put down? And the Provost of Edinburgh awarded Greyfriars Bobby the freedom of the city so that every night he could be there on his master's grave, summer and winter, spring and fall. It's a lovely little story, isn't it? It's a true story. You can see the little statue of Greyfriars Bobby there in Edinburgh.

And in that little true story of the affection of a dog for its master, the perseverance of that little dog over those years, its dedication to its dead master, it touches our heartstrings. Take that, magnify it to eternity, to infinity, and consider the dedication of the Lord Jesus Christ to his Father. "Whatever the cost, whatever the odds, whatever the suffering, whatever the pain, whatever the anguish, whatever the challenges, I do as the Father commanded me so that the world may know that I love the Father." Do you think Jesus died because he loved you? It's true, but he died because he loved the Father even more than he loved you. All the way to the cross.

And with that, he gets them moving. He gets them going. And when he says, "Rise, let us go from here," I think he meant just that. He started them collecting their bags, putting on their outer clothes. He started a general movement among the disciples as they would leave that upper room and continue the conversation through the streets of Jerusalem to the place where he would be arrested.

The Lord Jesus loves the Father and he loves you, and he has giving to you the Spirit, he has given us the word of God. He has given us his peace, peace with God, the peace of God. And he has given us the assurance that he has been victorious over all the powers of hell.

*Father, we thank you for this lovely, lovely promise of the Lord Jesus. We thank you that we can discover as we rest on his promises the peace of God dwelling in our hearts and minds, governing and guarding our minds when those minds are tormented by the various pressures that we are facing. And Father, tonight we pray for our brothers and sisters who are here in this room who are distracted by the pressures of today, whose minds are tortured by decisions they must make, by issues that they must resolve, and perhaps right now at this moment they're listening to this sermon and they're thinking, "I have no peace right now." Lord, will you bring them back to your word? Show them from the experience of the disciples and Jesus' promise fulfilled to them that their Lord will not leave them, will not leave them. He will not desert them. He will be with them. He will be with them in it all. And when they emerge out the other side, even if they have nothing else, they will have him. "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Please pour the oil, the ointment of that grace into your people's hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.*