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The Price of Peace

A Sermon

Delivered by
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PASTOR

in the

First Congregational Church of Oak Park, Illinois
Sunday, October 13, 1918



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Foreword



To the Men Who Are Printing This Sermon:

When I prepared this sermon, it was mine; when I delivered it, it was yours; now you are printing it that it may be preached to others, and it is ours. Let me thank you for the privilege of joining with you in the proclamation of our common patriotism and our common faith. You believe, and so do I, that our nation is engaged in a holy crusade, a war to make peace possible and durable. We believe that we have a stern duty to perform, and that we must not falter till that duty is done. But we believe that we ought to do that duty without hatred and in a nobler spirit than that of revenge. God grant us a peace in whose blessings all the world shall share, and a courage to fight on till that peace is secure.

W. E. B.

The Parsonage,
Sunday afternoon,
October 13, 1918.



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The Price of Peace



"They have healed the hurt of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace." Jeremiah 6:14.

"Through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross." Colossians 1:20.

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:7.



Whatever impression these texts make upon us, this surely is plain upon the face of them, that anything so vast and valuable as the peace which is contemplated in the word of God is not cheaply won nor lightly to be prized. The blood of Christ's cross is the unit of value of the world's spiritual peace—the peace of God which passeth all understanding. It is manifestly something deeper and larger than political peace. It is something more than the absence of war.

Jeremiah knew nothing about antiseptic surgery. He had not heard that tetanus germs develop in wounds that are not kept open till they heal from the bottom upward and outward. But prophets and priests were healers in that day, and he knew that it was possible for a superficially healed wound to end in a fatality. He denounced as spiritual malpractice the cheap optimism which was not brave enough to probe evils to the bottom, but counted them healed when they were only scabbed over. He denounced the political and spiritual leaders of his time, who healed slightly the people's hurt, saying, Peace, peace, when they had not removed the conditions that made peace impossible.

Spiritual Preparedness for Peace

Because I have much to say, and shall have time to say little of it, let me at the outset bring to you my principal thought, the one which constitutes the motive for the preaching of this sermon.

The American people have met the first staggering test which the war forced upon them, and have met it superbly. There is coming now another test, in some respects more exacting. Can we meet the conditions of a victorious peace with calmness, self-control, and unflinching devotion to the great spiritual ideals for which we entered the war?

We entered the war in a state of military unpreparedness; for myself I am not sorry that we did so. But we had a spiritual preparation for our part in the war. What we had witnessed for three years in Europe had given us national unity, clarity of vision, and time to formulate our definitions. We entered not only with moral courage but with spiritual poise such as the nations of our allies had not time to attain before the war burst upon them. But now, have we any such preparation for possibly sudden and completely victorious peace? To fail of preparedness now might be a greater calamity than to have failed then, as, thank God, we did not fail.

"America! America!
God mend thy every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law."

The Tidings of This Morning

I assume that most of you have not seen the morning papers. I have never taken a Sunday paper regularly. It is not that I am certain that to do so is sin, but I count it pathetic that people should waste the few precious hours of Sunday in feeding their souls on the husks of sixty-four or ninety-six pages of what they have too much of during the week, and some of which they would be quite as well off without on any day. Sunday, with our homes almost strange to us, our children needing our companionship, and with good books inviting us which we have no time to open during the week, to say nothing of the spiritual privileges of the day, is too good a day of opportunity to be wasted on the Sunday papers. But the past few weeks have been so momentous, and events of such importance have been possible or actual, I have felt that I had no right not to know the last word that might the better fit me to interpret to my own soul and to my congregation the message which God gives to me. So, for a few weeks, I have been buying a Sunday morning paper. For your information let me tell you that the reply of the German government, not yet officially received, but picked up by wireless, appears on its face fully to accept the terms of President Wilson's note, and to bring the possibility of peace well above the horizon.

When I announced this subject last Sunday, I did not know that Germany would on that very day ask for peace. But it came to me while I was in the pulpit as a kind of inspiration that the week which began with last Sunday would bring to the world some mighty movement looking toward peace, and that it was none too early to define its spiritual implications. So I announced this topic. The next morning I learned that on that very day Germany had sent forth a request for an armistice.

I wondered just how President Wilson would answer that note. Two of the three points in his reply I guessed in advance. That is, I felt sure that after his reply to the Austrian note of September 16, telling that government that he would discuss peace only on the basis which the United States had already laid down in the president's fourteen conditions, he could not say no when Germany professed to accept those terms; and on the other hand he would not wholly accept the overture till he was assured that Germany agreed to those conditions definitely and not merely as points for discussion. I judged that he would make a condition that Germany should evacuate all invaded territory. But it had not occurred to me that he would add to the suavity of a Virginia gentleman the astuteness of a down-east Yankee and put his answer in the form of questions. Still less did I guess that he would say to Prince Maximilian, "I want to know whether you represent anyone worth talking to, or only the Kaiser."

Let me tell you the substance of Germany's reply as it is printed this morning.

The President's Three Points and Germany's Reply

President Wilson's first question was:

Does the Imperial Chancellor mean that the imperial German government accepts the terms laid down by the President in his address to the congress of the United States on the 8th of January last and in subsequent addresses, and that its

object in entering into discussions would be only to agree upon the practical details of their application?

The German Government replies:

The German government has accepted the terms laid down by President Wilson in his address of January 8 and in his subsequent addresses on the foundation of a permanent peace of justice. Consequently, its object in entering into discussions would be only to agree upon practical details of the application of these terms.

Mr. Wilson then laid down his affirmation on the evacuation of conquered territory:

The President feels bound to say with regard to the suggestion of an armistice that he would not feel at liberty to propose a cessation of arms to the governments with which the government of the United States is associated against the central powers, so long as the armies of those powers are upon their soil. The good faith of any discussion would manifestly depend upon the consent of the central powers immediately to withdraw their forces everywhere from invaded territory.

To this the German Government replies fully accepting the condition and asking the President to secure the appointment of a mixed commission to arrange it:

The German government, in accord with the Austro-Hungarian government for the purpose of bringing about an armistice, declares itself ready to comply with the propositions of the President in regard to evacuation. The German government suggests that the President may occasion the meeting of a mixed commission for making the necessary arrangements concerning the evacuation.

Then the President puts what must have been to the Kaiser a very humiliating question:

The President also feels that he is justified in asking whether the Imperial Chancellor is speaking merely for the constituted authorities of the empire who have so far conducted the war. He deems the answer to these questions vital from every point of view.

To this the Imperial Chancellor answers that he represents not merely the Kaiser, but the great majority of the Reichstag, which represents the people of Germany:

The present German government, which has undertaken the responsibility for this step toward peace, has been formed by conferences and in agreement with the great majority of the Reichstag. The Chancellor, supported in all of his actions by the will of this majority, speaks in the name of the German government and of the German people.

This Brings Peace Visibly Nearer

I assume that this note will be scrutinized very closely not only in Washington, but in London, Paris and Rome, and if there is any reason to doubt that it means what it says, the points will be guarded that need to be guarded. But on the face of this document it looks as if Germany had conceded all that the President has asked as conditions of a negotiation looking toward peace. I do not suppose that any one has a right to assume that peace will come at once; it would be fatal to slacken our efforts on behalf of war. But this certainly is a long step toward peace; indeed, it seems to me that we are much nearer to that possibility than I thought possible when I announced this theme last Sunday.

However, the essential things which I have to say do not depend upon any accident in the day's news. Whether peace comes soon or late, it is coming; and without slackening in any degree our pressure to win the war, we must prepare our souls for peace. I am not discussing any of its diplomatic aspects, nor attempting to define any of its political or military conditions. I am only seeking to consider with you its spiritual implications.

The world that for more than four years has been engaged in the deadliest war of history discerns with gratitude and joy the first real promise of peace. When it is to come and precisely how it is to come are questions which belong to authorities military and diplomatic, but some of the underlying principles of any peace that can make the world secure lie within the sphere of spiritual definition.

The Cost of War

It is easier to compute the cost of war than the price of peace. The statisticians of the world are already busy and breaking their adding machines in the effort to compute the billions of dollars which the world has already paid and must hereafter pay as the pecuniary cost of the war. When they have done their best their computation will be incomplete. The indemnity may be assessed against Germany, but the whole world will have to turn in and pay the cost. It will impoverish the earth for the next hundred years. But if this were all we could view it with some degree of calmness. The cost to humanity has been greater.

Think for a moment what the war has cost outside the easy reckoning of the cash register. The universities of Europe are practically non-existent. Cambridge, Oxford, Edinborough, Paris, Berlin, Heidelberg and the rest are virtually in a state of suspended animation. Their quadrangles have become training grounds, their dormitories hospital wards, their laboratories fields for military investigation. Science has practically gone out of business, excepting as it relates to matters adjunct to the war. Musicians and artists and poets of all nations, patriotic in their ideals, and quick to respond to their higher emotions, have been among the first to answer the call to arms, and fatalities among them have been many. Research work has been all but abandoned. The work of translation of serious books on subjects other than war has virtually been discontinued. Not for a generation will it regain the place which it occupied in 1914.

The Cost to International Confidence

Worst of all, has been the cost to international faith and confidence, for which we must hold Germany primarily responsible. Her moral bankruptcy has brought down upon her not only the wrath of other nations, but the amazed sorrow of all who trusted her.

In some aspects, the saddest thing about it was Germany's inability to understand in advance what would be the attitude of the rest of the world with reference to her acts of aggression. She violated the Hague Convention by her submarine piracy, her foul work of assassination by poison gases, her bombardment of undefended cities, her ruthless invasion of neutral territory, and the moral appraisal which she put upon her own covenants when she described her treaties as scraps of paper. The world will never cease to be thankful that other nations refused to accept her estimate of her own and their moral obligations. Germany underestimated the moral courage of little Belgium; she underestimated the power of resistance in the soul of sunny France; she underestimated the might that was represented by the "contemptible little army" of Great Britain; most fatally of all she underestimated what she had to encounter and could not overcome in the moral heroism of the United States.

Germany's Self-Delusion

As late as July, 1918, the German Government was placarding the empire with a lurid poster, headed "Can America's entry make a decision in the war?" The answer was given in sections in the picture below. On the left was an enormous

Russian soldier and, standing side by side with him but very diminutive in comparison, Uncle Sam, holding up a placard announcing his intention to send from one to two million men into Germany. A pigmy American soldier representing the impossible million contrasted with the big bulk of the Russian soldier. These legends adorn this part of the cartoon. "Russia's army of millions could not down Germany!" "Russia used up altogether 15,000,000 men in vain! America threatens to send transports of one to two million men; but it cannot ship them! It is impossible for America to send and fit out in time for the European war a suitable and sufficiently large army and provide it with the necessary reinforcements." On the right hand side was the picture of a great battleship, representing England's 200,000,000 of gross tonnage, and beside it Uncle Sam with his little navy under his arm aggregating 3,000,000 gross tons, together with the confident statement that the U-boats were sinking twice as rapidly as England and America could rebuild. Across the bottom of the picture was a fleet of 25 ships of 2,000 tons each with a statement that all these would be necessary to transport a single regiment and its supplies, and that starving France would insist that America's limited sea power be used in transporting food for her population rather than an army to consume it. In the middle of the picture and across the top is a kind of map, showing that it is 200 times farther from New York to Europe than from London to the shore of France. The wide space between is decorated in the picture with German submarines, and transports sinking in flames; while the legend across the top cheerfully proclaims "Opportunity for the German U-boats." In the lower right hand corner of this part of the picture is a bursting bomb-shell with marks of erasure across the names of Serbia, Montenegro, Italy, Roumania, Russia and Belgium, and the German people were invited to contemplate with great glee the sure process of writing "America" next in the list and merrily blowing it to pieces.

The War Must Not End Till It Ends Righteously

General Hindenburg announced about the first of March his purpose to be in Paris on the first of April. He set the right date for it. But what shall we say of the moral stupidity of a nation which as late as July of 1918 could interpret America's entrance into the war in terms of this poster? Germany believed that America was so immersed in money-making she would never go to war, or that if she entered the war her distance from the scene of conflict and her devotion to the ideals of peace would make her an easy victim, but America is all the more dangerous because she loves peace. There is a terrible verse in the book of Revelation, which speaks of "the wrath of the Lamb." America did not go to war to avenge the sinking of the Lusitania, but all the waters of the Atlantic will not suffice to wash away the guilt of that foul deed until America has assurance that it can never happen again.

What a terrible awakening Germany has had! There are about two millions of Americans now confronting her, and from their first entrance upon the field at Chateau Thierry they have shown themselves heroes.

Does Germany want peace now? I confess that I had not expected a note as straightforward as her note appears to be. I expected that she would equivocate and endeavor to avoid a direct issue till winter had set in, hoping thereby to gain time for more favorable terms. Perhaps some diplomatic subtlety lurks in her apparent frankness; certainly she must not wonder if we suspect it; but I am disposed to think that she has begun to read the handwriting upon the wall, and that

however insincere at heart she realizes that she must bend the knee and ask for peace on terms as generous as her enemies may be disposed to grant her, hoping especially for clemency from the United States.

No earnest desire of ours for peace must deprive us of the compelling sense of duty to fight on till Germany has learned her lesson. She must come to a new knowledge of her own heart and of her standing among nations. She knows machinery and mechanics, but she does not know men. The war has cost too much to end now if it brings not with its ending assurance that it has not been fought in vain.

The Cost of Peace to Germany

What now will be the price of peace? It will involve heavy cost and tremendous strain upon our financial and economic system; tremendous problems will be involved in the demobilization of our army, the readjustment of our industries, the shrinking of our inflated values.

What will be the price to Germany? She will have to reckon first with her enormous war debt. She may be driven to democracy as a pretext for its repudiation. It will involve a terrible reckoning with her own people. The day may come when the population of Berlin will march in triumphal procession down the Sieges-Allee or Avenue of Victory and pull from their pedestals the thirty-two marble statues of Prussian rulers, which look like a job lot purchased on a bargain counter at a ten-cent store. Germany's population has been trained in submission and may continue to kiss the hand that smites it, but it is entirely within the range of possibility that the worst things that are to happen to Germany's rulers are not to be found in anything that the Allies will do to them, but in the terrible reckoning which she must meet at the hands of her own people.

If I had my way, do you know what I would do? I would not tear down any of Germany's really noble temples or works of art. I would wreck no vengeance on her cathedrals or her museums or universities. But I would like to see that boastful avenue reconstructed. I have traveled it with no higher sentiment than resentment at its vulgar boastfulness; but I have stood in Paris before the statue of Strassburg among the cities, Strassburg, draped in mourning because lost to France in that same war which Germany so boastfully remembers, and that has moved me. I would permit the French to march along the Sieges-Allee, and pull down the monument to Victory at its further end. I think the French have earned that right. As for the thirty-two statues inclosed with semi-circular seats, in each of which a dozen loyal Germans may sit at a time and contemplate with reverence the back of a dead Hohenzollern, I would leave the destruction of those to the German people, and I should like them to pull down the whole rogues' gallery of the present kaiser's ancestors and consign them to the lime-kiln. But if they did not choose to do it, I would condemn the people of Berlin to no worse penalty than that of having to continue to look at them. They may have them if they want them; we do not.

America's Share in the Spoils of War

What is America to win with the war? We shall be poorer for one thing, and with comparative poverty we may learn thrift. Let us hope we shall be more modest. Any American who has ever traveled in Europe and has encountered groups of his fellow-countrymen in its various cities, needs no one to tell him why Americans have not always been popular in other countries than their own. We shall gain as the result of this war respect for some people whom we have been accustomed to despise

—not only little nations like Belgium, but the colored soldiers from our own country. A lesson in modesty will do America no conceivable harm.

We shall have a new conception of the value of the physical well-being of our people as measured by the tests that constitute a man a good soldier, and we shall gain a new impression of what this means in terms of spiritual manhood.

Another thing America will get out of the war, and that is the conviction that this country is not big enough for two or more kinds of Americans. We shall have no room for German-Americans or Irish-Americans, but only for Americans.

Another thing we shall get out of the war, and that will be the conviction that America cannot attain her own destiny apart from her relation to the world. We shall have to have not only a new national unity, but a new international consciousness.

What Is the Democracy For Which We Fight?

We are striving to promote the progress of democracy as against autocracy. What is the democracy for which we want to make the world safe? Democracy is only incidentally a form of government; it is a philosophy of life, based on the recognition of the inherent worth of personality. It involves the right of Germany to choose to be governed by a Kaiser just as long as that Kaiser is acceptable to Germany and does not interfere with the right of other free governments to promote their own welfare in their own way. It insists only upon two conditions. First, that the Kaiser himself as truly as the President of this republic shall rule not by a divine fiat which authorizes Kaisers to tyrannize over any section of humanity large or small, but only by the willingness of some group of people thus for a time to be tyrannized over. The second condition is this: that no nation, whether it calls its chief magistrate a kaiser or a president, shall interfere with the equal right of every other nation, large or small, to promote the well-being of its own people in its own way so long as that way is compatible with the free exercise of self-government on the part of other peoples.

What Kind of a Peace Do We Want?

What is peace? It is something more and other than the absence of war. It is something different from the restoration of the conditions that existed in 1914. No status quo ante will satisfy the demands of the conscience of America, either at home or abroad.

We went into this war unselfishly, yet it has become plain as daylight that had we not chosen to fight Germany when we did we should have had to fight her after she had conquered France and Great Britain, as it seems certain she would have done. We should have had to meet her with all our unpreparedness at a time when her forces had conquered the rest of the world piece meal. We should have had to fight her not in the trenches of Europe, but on the shores of America. We do not want the restoration of a condition in which she might later force us to decide whether we would best take time by the forelock and do unto her what she was determined to do unto us.

A political peace is not all we want. If it were it could be had on many terms. China is at peace. The world once experienced the Pax Romana: it might have if it wanted to a Pax Teutonicus. We do not want that kind of peace, which is either a submission to tyranny or an invitation to war. We do not want a peace based on secret diplomacy, or planned to maintain the balance of power. We do not want a

peace grounded in mutual fear and nurtured in international distrust and maintained by mad competition in armament and battleships.

It is a wonderful situation in which we find ourselves at this hour. The German Chancellor addresses his note not to any of the European governments, but to the President of the United States, and affirms that he has no doubt the other nations will agree. Undoubtedly they will, and will be safe in their agreement. Germany, too, if she has but sense enough to realize it, could have no safer course than to trust to the justice, stern but fair, of the United States.

But let us remember that we came into this position of power partly because we entered the war late, and are able to cast our sword into a trembling balance—and also, thank God, the fact that we entered with clean hands. We shall come out of the war, still strong, still comparatively rich, still measurably unhurt. But little Belgium has nothing left, no territory, no capitol, no government, just her soul. And our Allies have suffered as we shall not need to suffer, and we shall have more than our share of the glory, and very largely a deciding voice in the settlement. The kind of peace that the world is to have will not be wholly of America's making, but it will be the kind of peace which America believes ought to be made.

Politically, the terms of that peace will be formulated in Washington, and made effective, possibly with modifications, in an international conference. But spiritually the conditions that make for peace and determine the character of the peace that is coming, are to be formulated in the souls of the people, in congregations like this. We are helping this morning to say what kind of peace the world is to have.

It is just possible that America might make the peace more terrible, and its conditions more onerous, than they otherwise would be. Southern women, after the Civil War, were more bitter than Confederate soldiers. Indeed, I have seldom found bitterness in a Confederate who really did fighting enough to respect the men who fought. We, who have fought least, might conceivably hate worst. We might become so arrogant, so unforgiving, as to make for greater wrath just because we have not suffered as others have suffered. God save us from that, the vengeful spirit that is generated by hate that never had opportunity to express itself adequately in the battle.

Shall We Demand a Punitive Peace?

It will be largely in the power of America to determine the kind of peace which the world is to have. We can enforce a punitive peace if we want to, and there will be many voices calling upon us to do so. Some punitive measures may be necessary, but if so they should be dictated not by a lust for revenge, but by the needs of the world. If Germany is punished it must be not only because Germany deserves punishment but because it is best for the world and for her that she should be punished. It may be necessary for us to place Germany under some restriction, commercial as well as military and naval, but for myself I am not willing to say that I will never buy any article that was made in Germany, or learn any truth that is to come to me out of Germany. I shall not be willing to determine my moral standards on the basis of economic jealousies. The welfare of the world will demand that Germany shall work as well as the rest of us and pay her full share of the debts she has incurred and has compelled other nations to incur. If she is to work she must have reasonable opportunity for her industries, and her market for her products must depend not on the jealousy of her competitors, but on the world's need.

Peace as Secretary Lansing Defines It

One of the noblest utterances of recent days was that of Secretary Lansing in his address last Thursday night at Auburn Theological Seminary. Speaking in that Christian institution he uttered sentiments worthy of a Christian statesman. I wish to change the order, but to emphasize three things that he said.

Let me quote first his word concerning stern justice. "Let us not forget that while stern justice without mercy is unchristian, mercy which destroys justice is equally unchristian."

That is a true word and the time has not yet come to blunt the edge of the sword of justice by crying "Peace, peace when there is no peace." Nor has the time come yet to say how gentle we will be with Germany when she is on her knees, nor how cheerfully we will consent to give her all that she asks in the way of markets and raw material.

(2) I quote second what Mr. Lansing put first: "The peace which is to come will not be a lasting peace if its terms are written in anger, or if revenge rather than the desire for strict justice and the common good is the underlying motive."

That seems to be a noble declaration. If Germany were wise she would drop the sword this instant, and accept the just and generous settlement which the United States, though a participant in the battle, would surely safeguard in the principles of settlement.

(3) The third fine utterance of Mr. Lansing was his declaration that "the new era born in blood and fire on the battlefields of Europe must be a Christian era in reality and not alone in name."

I quote this, because it is the very thing which I had planned to say to you—because it is just what I have been saying to you. Over and over I have said, It is not enough that we win the war; let us win it worthily. I have said, We must not be content with defeating Prussianism in Germany, and thereafter establish anything like its spirit at home. So on this day, when we wait again a word from Washington that shall define our diplomatic response to Germany's note, let me say what I have said so many times, Let us fight bravely and until we win what we went to war to win; but let us not forget that we entered in with high resolves and noble spiritual purposes, and let us maintain them till the war ends and write them into the treaty of peace.

There has come to America in the last few months a time of solemn testing. Let us devoutly thank God that we have met that test and have come forth triumphant. Historians marvel that thirteen little colonies could have mustered an army to make America independent. They marvel yet again that in the days of the Civil War America should have been able to call an army from her fields to make the nation free and keep in whole and send them back to their homes again without terrible economic and social disturbances. The historians of the future will marvel yet more that America in 1917 and 1918 was able to muster millions of men, transport them across the sea, and, with her army of boys who had never known anything but peace, defeat great armies of Germany's best trained soldiers.

But a moment of greater testing is coming. In the hour of victory, which is not very far away and which may be very near, may God give us self-control; may He grant us calmness of spirit; may He give us clear vision that shall discern the day-break of a new civilization through the clouds and thick darkness. May He give us such greatness of soul that we shall be able to turn a deaf ear to all who will be



demanding revenge and international hatred. May He make us as modest in victory as we have been courageous during the conflict. If nations that have suffered more than we cry out in their agony for a peace that is based on hatred and a frightfulness of peace, may God give to America strength to stand for a peace whose corner-stone is righteousness. May He help us to build thereon with other nations a new temple of Humanity, dedicated to national integrity, international good will and the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

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