

PEACE TO THOSE WHO PLEASE GOD

Luke 2: 8-14 and Luke 1: 57-69, 76-79 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

We really want peace; it's one of our greatest desires. We want God's gracious gift to us at Christmas. Isaiah in Isaiah 9: 6 prophesied Jesus' first coming, saying, "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." We want Jesus and His gift of peace, but we also want our own way. We desire peace if we don't have to deal with peace disturbing things in our lives. Peace is more than the absence of war, conflicts, strife, or turmoil. Having Christmas peace, we must lay down the ultimate cause of all our conflicts, sin. It must be laid down at the feet of Jesus, even as the wise men laid down their gold, frankincense and myrrh. Sin is like a ticking time bomb, attempting to wreck, remove and ruin peace with God, peace in our marriage, peace in our family and extended families, peace in our church, and peace in our world. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God absorbed the fullest blast of all our sin in His own body on the cross. Today, He wears and bears forever the terrible scars of that explosion that He took at Calvary upon His hands, His feet, and His side.

Christmas peace is not something we achieve by our own efforts. Christmas peace is something we receive when we receive Jesus. Those who receive Jesus and live obediently in His forgiving love, know His peace. Peace is elusive if we are trying to achieve it through our own means, rejecting someone who has hurt us, or rejecting someone whom we have a complaint against. Vance Havner said, "Christmas is based on an exchange of gifts, the gift of God to man—His Son; and the gift of man to God, when we give ourselves to Him." He's right. Not one of us can have Christmas peace if we take peace from God for ourselves and refuse to pass on that peace to our spouse, our family, our church, and to those we meet. We must continue in God's gift of peace by dispensing **peace**, not just when we are born again, but every day, and many more times each day. God gives **peace**, and we give back peace to Him and to others. There is no greater gift we can give back to God than to thankfully dispense His peace to this sin-cursed world. (Eph. 6: 15)

I ask you this morning—is there any Christmas "un-peace" in your life? Perhaps today, as we allow the Lord to search our hearts on this Christmas Sunday, would we be willing to hand over our weapons of war, our strife, our sinful attitudes, our separation from those we are bound to by covenant and before witnesses, and selfish desire for our own way. Today, study with me the words of the angel. This angel was joined by a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, **peace** among those with whom He is

pleased.” What is the essence of this Christmas gift of peace at Christmas? I see four elements that make up God’s gift of Christmas peace. What are they?

CHRISTMAS PEACE IS GOD’S GIFT TO US OF JESUS HIMSELF, WHOSE NAME AND PERSON IS PEACE. (I.)

Don’t be surprised to find in Luke 2: 14 that the incarnate gift of God’s Son is Himself, God in the flesh, our Peace. Isaiah 9: 6 calls Messiah the Prince of Peace. Isaiah is not the only prophet telling us Jesus is our peace. Turn to Micah 5: 2, 4, 5. “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me One who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days...And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they shall dwell secure, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth. And He shall be their **peace.**” When the apostle Paul wrote about Jesus in Ephesians 2: 14, 17, “For He Himself is our peace, who has broken down every wall...And He came and preached **peace** to you who were far off and **peace** to those who were near.”

On Thursday, December 18th, I received a morning call from a lady named June Summers. She and her dedicated to Jesus husband are in their seventies. They live in Washington, just west of Puget Sound near Bremerton, in a tiny place called Port Ludlow. The first thing she asked me was if I was open to having her pray the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6: 24-26 over me. She found my name on the Internet and felt led to pray this blessing over me. I cannot forget the authority and yet the tenderness of her prayer. She prayed, “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.**” Then she kept saying “Shalom, brother! Can I pray for any special requests for you? I gave her five important names of people that came to my mind immediately. She then first prayed over me that wheelbarrows full of God’s health, healing, rescue, protection, and deliverance would be my portion and with my wife. Then she named the people I gave her and prayed the same over them claiming Psalm 91: 15, praying words about “When he calls to me, I will answer him, I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.” It was in this call that God confirmed strongly in my heart that His call for me was to preach on **His Christmas gift of peace** today. For those of you in our small group, when you ever go down the hall to the gold bathroom, on the wall to the right of the sink is a beautiful little embroidered sign, **“He Himself is our peace.”** It was made for me in 1994 by a teenage lady. Her Pastor father and his wife and children lived in Foscani, not far from the Black Sea. Today, on Christmas Sunday, I ask you, “Can you say of Jesus, God’s Christmas gift to us, “He Himself is my Peace.”? 2ndly,

CHRISTMAS PEACE IS GOD’S GIFT TO US OF HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE TO WHOM WE ARE JOINED. (II.) Look

at the angels’ words in Luke 2: 14. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased.” The Greek word is **eirene**. Eirene comes from the primary verb in the word, **eire** which means “to join.” Eirene means peace, contentment, quietness, rest, and harmony in relationships we have with those with whom we are joined. We have many relationships, but they start with God, with whom we are joined by our new birth, and then our spouse, with whom we are joined by sacred covenant and by our vows before witnesses. We are joined by birth to our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and great great grandchildren and they are joined by birth to us. These relationships of being joined include our brothers and sisters in the family of God, within His church, to whom we are joined by God’s placement in this local family who are on the narrow road together. It includes those who live next to us, our neighbors to whom we are joined by the very location of our homes and it includes those we work with to whom we are joined by employment, and those we are joined to by where we go to school. This gift of Christmas peace should extend to those whom we are joined with as fellow American citizens in our country and those others in our country who live and serve in our land to whom we are joined by geography. And when we travel outside our country, this Christmas peace is to extend to those far off as well to those who are near. (Ephesians 2: 17)

To whom is this peace to be extended? “On earth peace, good will toward men, or peace among those with whom God is pleased.” As I was studying about God’s Christmas peace, I was reading in Mark 9 where the disciples were arguing about who was greatest. Jesus asked them in Mark 9: 34 what they were arguing about, and they held their peace—meaning they kept silent. This isn’t the same word eirene, but the Greek word **siopao** which means “Hush, be still!” Jesus brings this kind of peace too in relationships where storms are raging. You remember what Jesus did when He had been sleeping in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. A terrible storm blew up and the disciples asked Jesus, “Don’t you care that we are about to perish? And Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the angry sea, “Siopao—Hush—Peace, be still! This Christmas peace Phillips Brooks wrote about in his carol, “O Little Town of Bethlehem” in verse 3. “How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given. So God imparts to human hearts, the blessings of His heaven. No ear may hear His coming, But in this world of sin, Where meek souls will receive Him still, The dear Christ enters in.” He also wrote in verse 2, “O morning stars together, Proclaim the holy birth, And praises sing to God the King, And **peace** to men on earth. Beloved, where Christmas peace comes, the clamor ceases. There is a quiet hush. Is this what God commands? As I was studying in Mark’s Gospel, chapter 9 about the disciples being silent when Jesus

caught them quarreling, I read on to find in Mark 9: 50—“Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace—**eirene** with one another, again—the same word derivative that the angels used with the shepherds. Beloved, Christmas peace is given to us to hush the storm, the strife, the quarreling, the bickering as Jesus says to us—“You are joined together. Be at peace, eirene, with one another.” Thirdly,

CHRISTMAS PEACE IS GOD’S GIFT TO US OF INNER GOOD WILL AND FAVOR WITH THOSE WITH WHOM HE IS PLEASED. (III.)

Notice again the angel’s words, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, **peace**, good will toward men, or **peace** among those with whom He is pleased.” This additional word of good will adds to the gift of peace that it is not a curse, but a blessing beyond what any of us can bestow. This good will makes me remember that this message was being delivered to lowly, humble shepherds in occupied territory. When Christ was born, there was a skeletal external peace. Judaea was not at war with Rome. Rome won that battle years before, and Judaea was living in bondage to Roman rule under what historians call – Pax Romana. This Roman peace is not what the gift of God at Christmas is. Historian Epictetus in the first century, wrote, “While the Roman emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearns more than even for outward peace.” Jesus came to bring inner pax or peace. That’s God’s Christmas gift—peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. When the inner peace and harmony is there, because our human souls have peace with God, peace not only comes now to all our mutual relationships. No, there’s more to this inner peace.

This inner peace also applies to our life’s circumstances, calamities, trials, and afflictions, as well as to our fellow travelers on the road of life. As we honor the Lord Jesus Christ with our obedience, to that extent, the Christmas gift of peace that He came to bring becomes a glorious reality. Yet, you and I all know, even seated in this sanctuary, apart from revival, there may be in us a state of disorder and strife without real peace, either that we are perpetuating or a lack of real peace because peace is not being extended to us, or by us to others. Getting back to the Greek word for “good will,” it is the word **eudokia**. Eudokia means satisfaction, delight, kindness, good pleasure, and a willing resolve. Combined with the word eirene, this gift of God’s delight and pleasure is that this favor, this gift of peace bestowed on us through Christ’s coming incarnate is another way of describing God’s gift of peace. In the Greek, I read only 4 Greek words—eirene en anthropois eudokia. It’s just four words and God’s way of saying peace, contentment, quietness, rest, and harmony in relationships among men or people blessed by God’s kindness. I tremble as I see the dis-peace in our world, and the awful dis-peace often in families, in marriages, in churches, and in extended families.

Where's the blessing of God's good will? Many would justify their reasons for maintaining dis-peace and un-peace with their spouse or their family or folk in their church family. I tremble for any of you here today who would dare to justify holding a grudge or maintaining a separation from another fellow believer. Christmas peace is extending to those we are joined to in families and marriages and in fellowship in God's house—extending God's peace to them—God's favor and good will to all men—to all those among whom God is pleased. To say it in its truest form, we must conclude that when we bar the door to those we are joined to—God is not pleased. In fact, God hates it. Such actions bar the door of God extending us His forgiveness and Christmas peace.

We read Jesus' words to His disciples in the Lord's Prayer we pray together, "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Following the prayer, Jesus goes farther—in Matthew 6: 14, 15. He warns us, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." It is outside of God's Christmas gift of peace to bar the door of love and forgiveness to those that have trespassed against us. This week I shuddered as I read a passage from the prophet Malachi in Malachi 2: 14-16 to my wife. We were speaking of the tragedy of separation and divorce. I read from the NASB, "The LORD has been a witness between you and the wife/husband of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she/he is your companion and your wife/husband by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit—(so) that you do not deal treacherously." God gave us the gift of His own beloved Son incarnate at Christmas to be our Bridegroom and we His bride. I call you as God's people to place the best gift of all under your tree, earmarked for your spouse, or your children or your parents. Give yourself back as a Christmas gift—God's gift of peace to those whom you are joined to—give yourself back to anyone here at church you are estranged from or anyone. Then you will know the utter blessing and joy of the words of the angels—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased." Fourthly and lastly,

**CHRISTMAS PEACE IS GOD'S GIFT TO US PROCEEDING ONLY
FROM HIGHEST HEAVEN ABOVE, NEVER FROM US INITIALLY. (IV.)**

This word of the angels is translated so many different ways as everyone is trying to decide about the peace that Jesus gives. The KJV says "peace, good will toward men—let's clarify that includes all people. The Revised Standard Version says it

this way—“Peace, among men of good will.” That meaning can make us think of men or people of good will—making us think that the Christmas gift of peace is filtered only to good people. Never! This good will, this eudokia, this satisfaction and kindness and delight and good pleasure and willing resolve from God, proceeds as Jesus came—straight from heaven, from God to us. Peace is not ever initially from us. This peace on earth thus will in its highest meaning only become a full reality among those who are recipients of the good will and favor of God, that’s the redeemed in Christ, those ordained to full salvation as children of God whose only hope and stay is the cross of Christ. Beloved, we have nothing that we have not received. We can’t forgive out of our goodness. Forgiveness is part of the Christmas gift of peace God gives to the redeemed. We can’t live for Jesus on our own without His peace. Paul tells us the time is short, and he gives us three doublets to avoid. He writes in Romans 13: 13, 14, “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not (1) in orgies and drunkenness, (2) not in sexual immorality and sensuality, (3) not in quarreling and jealousy—that’s un-peace. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Paul goes on to say in Romans 14: 17, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and **peace** and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

As I close, I remind you that it’s impossible to receive God’s gift of peace without God’s gift of repentance and faith—also God’s gift. But once we are God’s children, he wants us to walk in His peace daily. This past Friday, I reread the whole story of Joseph and his brother’s jealous treachery with him, telling their father Jacob he was dead, but selling him into bondage to the Midianite traders heading to Egypt. Most of you know the story. He was employed by Potiphar and accused falsely by his wife. He wound up in prison for years, interpreting two dreams in prison, but being forgotten by the king’s chief cupbearer, then interpreting Pharaoh’s dream and being made second in Egypt only to Pharaoh. In the famine, he prepared Egypt for, he finally met and revealed himself to his brothers who bowed down to him as he once dreamed. Then he sent them home to get his father, sending wagons with them full of some of Egypt’s finest treasures. I wept and wept as I reread the story—until I realized afresh Joseph’s concern for his brothers as he sent them home. I read, in Genesis 45:24 NLT—“So Joseph sent his brothers off, and as they left, he called after them, “Don’t quarrel about all this along the way.” Beloved, God knows us all—we quarrel with God, with His Word, and you may have roast preacher for dinner—but the God of Christmas peace is begging you—go home today loaded with God’s Christmas peace—and I call out to you as I finish—“Do not quarrel about all this along the way.” I love you so much. Have God’s Christmas peace for yourselves and dispense His peace freely to everyone in your life. Have a Blessed Christmas! Amen.

