

Peace

Christmas Sermons Part 20

Luke 2:14 12-24-2014

Summary: The angels announced Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace for mankind, the recipients of God's favor. Peace with God comes through faith in Christ, and that peace can help us have peaceful relationships (by being amazed at how much we have been forgiven), and inner peace (by trusting the one who is now only for us).

Luke 2:14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Introduction

Glory to God

Luke 2:4 Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The angel of the Lord came and announced all that.¹ One angel is enough to make the announcement. But one angel was not enough to celebrate the announcement properly.

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest,

The statement **Glory to God** is a cry for God to be glorified. God is already as glorious as He can be, so to glorify Him does not mean you increase how glorious He is, but rather that you increase how glorious He is in the eyes of people. God can never become more glorious than He already is. But our ability to see and appreciate and marvel at His glory can be increased. And whenever you do something that increases someone's ability to marvel at God's glory, that is what it means to glorify God. So the heavenly host – the army of angels appears in the sky and calls upon the entire creation to glorify God more and more because of this awesome work of salvation that just took place in Bethlehem.

And they locate God **in the highest** place. What just took place in that stable in Bethlehem is an act of salvation that rattles the very creation, and reverberates and thunders even to the highest heaven.

Prior to this time this army of angels had seen the glory of God the Son, and they knew something of God's plan of redemption for man. So it is not like they have never seen anything glorious before. But when they become aware of exactly what is happening here - God becoming a man - this is the not only

¹ This is one of the reasons I believe the angel of the Lord was an actual angel and not the pre-incarnate Christ. In this verse the angel of the Lord appears after Jesus was born.

the greatest thing that has ever happened on earth, but it is the most monumental shakeup that has ever taken place in heaven. The heavenly host wants all creation to respond with joy to this incredible event, and so they come to earth in such a way as to be able to be seen, and they burst out shouting, “**Glory to God in the Highest.**” That is why it’s a great idea, at Christmas time, to come here and join your voice with all the saints and sing praises to God for sending a Savior.

Peace

But that is only the first half of their song. There is a second part. The first part is about heaven; the second part is about earth.

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.²

God is to be glorified in the highest heaven because He has shown favor this day to mankind.

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”

What is the good news of great joy? The angels tell us in verse 14 – **peace.**

The Meaning of Peace

What is peace? According to the peace movement in the United States, peace happens when the United States just surrenders and backs out of all wars. If we just lay down our arms, the world will all follow our lead and the whole planet will suddenly be at peace. But the absurdity of that is obvious to anyone with our eyes to see. All over the world there have been wars and genocides and holocausts and all kinds of horrific things that have not involved the United States.

But what if we could somehow convince all world leaders to cease fire, so there wasn’t a single war going anywhere on earth? Would that be world peace? No, because war is not the only disruption of peace. You also have the problem of crime – assaults and murders and violence in every city in the world every single day.

What if you could somehow eliminate all crime? Then would we have peace? No, because there are all kinds of disruptions of peace that are perfectly legal. A husband and wife get into an argument; they say some harsh things to each other and go to sleep back-to-back that night. That’s not peace.

The world has their solutions to that. They say, “Just set up boundaries, so no one can hurt you anymore.” But that doesn’t work, because all that does is make people more selfish, so when their boundaries collide with someone else’s boundaries, they get mad, and there goes the “peace.”

But suppose we could somehow make that work – then would we have peace? If all relationships everywhere in the world were amiable and friendly without any hostility – then would we have world peace? No, because what about the turmoil you feel inside yourself? A kid is on Christmas break but he has a knot in his stomach every time he thinks about going back to school because he’s failing his classes – that’s not peace. A woman is so filled with self-loathing that she cuts herself – that’s not peace. A man has constant emotional pain because he feels like a failure in his career and in his marriage and everything else. That’s not peace. And you can give him some pills to take some of the edge off the turmoil inside, but that is still a long way from being real peace.

There is a massive, desperate famine of peace in this world. And all the picket signs and bumper stickers in the world won’t put the slightest dent in the problem. Global peace is not going to come through picket signs. Peace in relationships is not going to come through boundaries. And inner peace is

² Literally, “on earth, peace to men of favor/pleasure.” In the poetic language of the exclamation, words are left out. The idea seems to be “on earth, peace to men of [God’s] favor.” There is some debate about whether this means peace to the particular ones God has favored, or peace to men, who have been favored this day by God. I take that latter view because of verse 10, which shows this good news of great joy is **for all the people.** The KJV translation (peace on earth good will to men) is based on a faulty manuscript reading.

not going to come through pills or therapy. Some of those things might smooth out a little bit of the agitation on the surface, but none of them can bring real peace, and here's why: The reason there is a famine of peace in this world is described in Romans 8:7.

Romans 8:7 the sinful mind is hostile to God.

The reason we don't have inner peace, and the reason we don't have peace in our relationships, and in society and among nations is because the human race does not have peace with God. Deep down, there is an underlying hostility toward God. And when you are at odds with your Creator – everything else in your life is going to be out of tune.

“Well, what can mankind do to be at peace with God?”

Nothing. We have already sinned against Him and broken His commands millions of times – the damage is done. There is no way for us to go back and undo what we have done. Mankind chose to sin against its Creator, and place itself under God's wrath, and there is absolutely nothing we could ever do to fix that. Nor do we have the power to reach inside and take out that underlying hostility toward God that is ingrained in the human heart.

Mankind's only hope was for God to fix it. Our only hope was for God Himself to bring peace between us and Him. And so 700 years before Jesus was born, God sent a prophet by the name of Isaiah to give us this message:

Isaiah 9:5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

(Combat boots and bloody uniforms will be a thing of the past.)

6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.

Ever-increasing peace. God promised that someday a child would be born, and that child would be God Himself. And He would come into this world as the Prince of Peace. He would reestablish peace between God and man, and the result of that will be peace among the nations, peace in our relationships, and peace within us. Right around the same time period that Isaiah wrote, God sent another prophet to tell us the location where this Prince of Peace child would be born.

Micah 5:2 But you, Bethlehem ... though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old ... 5 And he will be their peace.

That was our great hope as the human race waited for this Prince of Peace to arrive. It became known as the good news of peace – or the gospel of peace (“gospel” is just a translation of the phrase “good news”).

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace

Nahum 1:15 Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!

And it is still called the good news of peace, or gospel of peace in the New Testament, where we find out who this Prince of Peace is.

Acts 10:36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

Ephesians 2:17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

Ephesians 6:15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

That good news about peace is what angels were referring to when they appeared in the sky the night Jesus was born and said, **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth – peace.** Last Sunday I told you that when Satan tried to kill Jesus, Michael stood up and said, “This means war.” Now, when the child is born, these angels arrived and say, “This means peace.” Peace is to spread everywhere this child is received.

Luke has already prepared us for this in the previous chapter. Turn back a page to chapter one and you’ll see the arrival of the Messiah described as being like the rising sun.

Luke 1:78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

So the angels give us the two great purposes for the coming of Jesus: to show His glory, and to bring peace to mankind. His glory, our peace. His greatness, our joy. His beauty, our pleasure. The more our eyes open up to see His glory, the more all the chaos of life disappears and all the disordered parts of our lives fall into place.

How to Get Peace

So we have three questions to answer. First, how do you get peace with God? Second, how can you use that peace to bring about peaceful relationships in your life? And third, how can you use that peace with God to bring about inner peace and calm in your heart?

Peace with God

So we’ll start with peace with God. Here is how it works: Again, this was written 700 years before Jesus was born. And in this chapter Isaiah describes exactly what would happen to the Messiah.

Isaiah 53:5 he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the sin of us all.

But we went astray – we sinned, but God laid the guilt of our sin on Jesus and then crushed Him with punishment for that sin. And that punishment is what brings us peace. Now the penalty is paid, God’s wrath is satisfied, and it is now possible for us to be at peace with Him. There was nothing we could do to be at peace with God. But what we could never do, Jesus did. By taking our punishment, and giving us new life, Jesus was able to fix the broken relationship on both ends. On God’s end, we were justified in His sight. Jesus absorbed all the wrath, so that God has nothing but love now toward all those who are associated with Jesus. And on our end – Jesus was able to fix the problem of that underlying hostility in our hearts toward God. What we could never do, Jesus did.

Colossians 1:21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight

So when the angel announced peace for those on the earth, does that mean every individual on the planet gets the peace? No. This peace comes only to those who receive this child who was born. A little later in the Gospel of Luke we read these words:

Luke 10:5 Jesus says to his disciples, “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.”

Not everyone gets this peace because not everyone receives the Prince of Peace. And exactly how do you go about receiving the Prince of Peace? One word: faith.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

We have peace with God when we are justified, and the only way to become justified and God's sight is through faith. Listen to the rest of the sentence in Colossians 1 – you see that same condition.

Colossians 1:22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— 23 if you continue in your faith

You have to have faith and you have to continue in that faith.

Faith

There are two parts to faith: believing and trusting. You believe the truth about Jesus in the Scriptures, and you trust Him enough to follow His way instead of your own way. Trusting Him enough to follow Him, and believing the truth about Him in the Bible – put those together and you have faith. You don't get peace with God by cleaning up your life; you don't get peace with God by getting your act together; you don't get peace with God by reforming yourself; you don't get peace with God by doing things for God – there is one way and one way only to get peace with God: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who endured the punishment that brought us peace.

At that point God's anger at us because of our sin is put away. Our rebellion against him is overcome and our hearts are won over. God adopts us into his family, and from now on all his dealings with us are for our good. He will never be against us. He is our Father, and He now takes great delight in us. We have peace with God.

Peace with People

Now the next question – how do you use your peace with God to gain greater peace in your relationships? You have peace with God, now how do you have peace with people? This isn't something you will ever have total control over, because even if you do everything right, the other person might not be willing to be at peace with you. All you can control is the part that depends on you.

Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with all men.

So God only holds you responsible for the part that you have control over. But that is still a pretty hefty chunk of responsibility, isn't it? Because there really is a lot that you can do. You can overlook small irritations without becoming irritable. You can fully forgive any size evil done against you from your heart. You can be patient with a person even while he is continuing to sin against you. You can repay evil with kindness. You can overcome evil with good. You can turn away anger with a soft word. You can absorb insults and let them slide off like water off a duck's back, instead of making a federal case out of it. You can refuse to engage in arguments and quarrels. You can assume the best motives in people, instead of pretending you have insight into people's hearts. You can listen to people with such compassion and love that they don't want to fight against you anymore. You can humble yourself and serve the other person and pray for them. There is a whole lot that you can do on your end.

But none of that is especially easy, is it? Especially when that person is hurting you deeply. So how do you do it? How do you get yourself to be willing to do all those things that you know you should be doing, when in your heart all you want to do is retaliate? This isn't a bad question for us to ask at Christmas time, because at Christmas we get together with family, and many of us have strained relationships with family members.

And on top of that, we tend to have conflicts even with family members that we get along with just fine most of the time, because we have all kinds of expectations during the holidays, and family members have a way of messing up our expectations.

So how do we use our peace with God to enable ourselves to live at peace with one another? One great answer to that question is in Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

How, Paul? How do I get rid of all that?

32 Be kind and tenderhearted to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

You will be able to show compassion to the people who are hurting you, and you will be able to forgive and be tenderhearted, when you have a profound awareness of how much God has forgiven you. This is the point of the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18. Normally it would be understandable to take legal action against someone who owes you 100 denarii. That's a third of the year's wage. It is a huge debt. But in that story it was outrageous for the guy not to forgive, because of how much he had just been forgiven. He had just been forgiven that debt of 10,000 talents, which was like trillions and trillions of dollars. And the point is this – there is no way you can be bitter toward someone who is hurting you, while at the same time remembering how much you have been forgiven. The only way to have an unforgiving heart or an unmerciful heart is to forget the price that Jesus paid to forgive your sin.

Cultivate a sense of amazement that, in spite of all your sins, God has forgiven you through Christ. Be amazed that you have peace with God. When we start taking our forgiveness for granted, and we are no longer amazed at it, that is when we become unforgiving. We get so we are more amazed at how much people are sinning against us than we are about how much God has forgiven us. And when you get to that point, forgiving others will feel impossible. Cultivate amazement at how much you have been forgiven and how much mercy you have been shown. That will enable you to be tenderhearted.

Will people take advantage of you if you do that? Yep. But so what? God will take care of that. You cannot really do anything about that anyway. No amount of boundaries will be able to protect you. And no matter how hard you try to control the situation, or teach the person a lesson, or retaliate – none of that will work. You could never bring about justice, so leave that up to God. Our role is to be tenderhearted and forgive as we have been forgiven. Jesus gave His life for us, and He asks us, “For My sake, will you forgive one another?”

Peace with Yourself

That is how you use your peace with God to have peace with people. But how about peace with ourselves? Inner peace. How do you use your peace with God to calm your agitated, fearful, worrying, fretting, anxious, guilty, self-loathing, condemning heart? How do you replace all that with things like joy and hope and peace? The answer is in Romans 15.

Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It comes from trusting Him. Now that you have peace with God, and He is only for you and never against you – you can trust Him with all the anxieties that are attacking your heart.

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Guard? What do I need to be guarded from? What danger is lurking out there that you need to be guarded and protected from by the peace of God that transcends understanding? Answer: the things that don't transcend understanding. That is what you need protection from – all those things your mind does understand, like – the fact that you don't have enough money to pay your bills next month. Like the fact that this problem in your home or at work seems to have no solution. The fact that right around the corner, pain is waiting for you. Your physical problem is getting worse. Our understanding is loaded with reasons why we need to be worried and anxious and afraid and agitated and upset. Those anxieties threaten you. And you will be safe from them only when the peace of God that transcends all understanding guards both your heart and your mind.

How does that happen? What does it say in verse 7? It happens **in Christ Jesus**. When you have peace with God, and one by one you cast all your anxieties on Him, knowing that He cares for you, and you do that with thanksgiving – even before He answers your prayer, you thank Him for whatever it is He is going to decide to do – when you have that kind of trust in Him, His peace will guard your heart and mind.

That is how you get peace from worry. But what about self condemnation? How do you set your heart at rest when it is condemning you? You read Romans 8:1.

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

God is not condemning you. So if your heart is condemning you and God isn't, the question is – whose judgment matters more in your heart – yours? Or God's? You have arrived at one conclusion based on your performance. God has arrived at a different conclusion based on His desire to honor His Son. So which conclusion is the one that is going to reign supreme in your heart? Who is greater – you or God?

1 John 3:19 This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence 20 whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts

God is greater, and His judgment trumps yours. Spend more of your time thinking about what God says than about how you feel.

Conclusion

My Christmas wish for you tonight is the same as the one the angels gave – peace. If you are trying to gain inner peace or peace in your relationships, but you don't have peace with God yet, you are wasting your time. Don't let another Christmas day pass while ignoring the greatest news ever to be delivered – that because of the arrival of the Prince of Peace into the world, you can have peace with God. Place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ tonight.

And for those who do have peace with God – use that peace to build peace with those around you by being amazed at how much you have been forgiven.

And then calm all the anxieties and fears in your own heart, by trusting the one in whose sight you are a delight, and who is only for you and never against you.