

"Peace On Earth"
Isaiah 9:1-7; Luke 2:8-14
Series: Advent 2008 [#2]
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Theme: **Christmas Celebrates Christ Bringing True, Everlasting Peace To Earth.**

Introduction

"Peace On Earth." An article states,

"A former president of the Norwegian Academy of Sciences, and historians from England, Egypt, Germany and India have come up with some startling information: since 3600 B.C., the world has known only 292 years of peace! During this period there have been 14,531 wars, large and small, in which 3.64 billion people have been killed. The value of the property destroyed would pay for a golden belt around the earth 156 kilometers in width and ten meters thick. Since 650 B.C. there have been 1,656 arms races, only sixteen of which have not ended in war. The remainder have ended in economic collapse."

That's astounding! It paints a striking picture of a world without peace—13 years of war for every year of peace, and unbelievably horrific costs by every measure! This is a striking, sobering picture often cited in churches during this season as we think about "Peace on Earth."

But, the report is fanciful rather than factual, and has been called "The Great Statistics of War Hoax." Even so, it strikes a chord with Longfellow's words written during the U.S. Civil War which we sang earlier, and the widespread feelings behind them, "There is no peace on earth ... for hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men." "Peace On Earth. Really?"

We are looking at *Peace* on this second Sunday of Advent. We will note several familiar Biblical claims about peace, try to understand what they are about, and zero in on knowing and experiencing the reality of true peace. The core truth for this morning is that *Christmas Celebrates Christ Bringing True, Everlasting Peace To Earth*. The promise of the Bible is ...

The Promise: Christ, The Messiah Will Bring Peace.

The Messiah, who is the Prince of Peace, will establish and uphold peace. Go to the familiar words in Isaiah 9, verses 6-7,

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, *Prince of Peace*. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of *peace*, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold

it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.”

When we hear the title *Prince*, we tend to think of royalty. This term was used much more broadly in its over 380 occurrences in the Old Testament. It spoke of the leader of a group, a military force, a province or nation. Generally, it referred to one who is in control, who provides direction and has authority. Isaiah 9:6 tells us that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is the ruler over, the one who possesses and dispenses peace.

Last week we looked at and thought about those beautiful words in Isaiah 2,

“And He [the Messiah] will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war.” (v. 4)

And, we can turn ahead to Isaiah’s description of peace under the Messiah’s reign in chapter 11,

“And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” (verses 6-9)

There is much truth here, but for now note the *promise*: Christ, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace will establish and uphold peace. That is God’s *promise*.

Then, moving from the promise, we turn to the New Testament’s record and description of Christ’s coming to earth: the Messiah’s birth brought peace to earth. After the angel’s startling appearance and announcement to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born, it was joined by a huge choir of angels, Luke records, “...praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace* among men with whom He is pleased.’” (Luke 2:13b-14). “Let there be peace!” “Peace has come to earth!” Just over 60 years later the Apostle Paul developed this in Ephesians 2, starting by telling us in verse 14, “For He [Jesus] Himself *is our peace*...” (14)

And so, there is the Bible’s promise—*Christ the Messiah, Will Bring Peace*. ... *But*, there is a problem.

The Problem: Where Is The Peace?

The absence of peace is conspicuously obvious in our world. Read the papers, watch and listen to the news about...

- the unending string of strife, battles and wars;
- of ongoing, serious economic turbulence;
- of constant and growing family fractures;
- and, of so much personal distress.

One writer states that in any given year, one in five Canadians will experience symptoms of mental disorder. (*Last Taboo*, 2002)

Then, a recent study claims that one in five young Americans has a personality disorder that interferes with everyday life. (Olfson, et. al., 2008)

Yes, it certainly looks as though “There is no peace on earth ... for hate *is* strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.”

So we need to look more deeply, we need to sharpen our understanding of the Bible’s truth about peace. The *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* gives two basic meanings of *peace*:

- freedom from noise or anxiety;
- freedom from or the ending of war.

From here let’s go to the Biblical meaning. The Hebrew word for peace in Isaiah 9:6 [*shalom*] occurs at least 210 times in the Old Testament. The background to this word comes from the ideas of completion, fulfillment, wholeness and unity. Its use in the Old Testament had the ideas of:

- Peace and safety for a nation; that is, not being threatened, or not being at war.
- Secondly, wholeness in both a literal and figurative sense. In Deuteronomy 27 we find an interesting literal usage. The laws of God were given to the people of Israel before crossing the Jordan into their promised land. Verse 5, “Moreover, you shall build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield an iron tool on them. You shall build the altar of the LORD your God of *uncut stones*, and you shall offer on it burnt offerings to the LORD your God.” The word “*uncut*” is our word *shalom* — *whole*.
- Another stream of meaning is to be fulfilled or complete. In Genesis 15:16 we read “... the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet *complete*.” [our word]

One application of this idea of fulfilling or completing that is found at least 18 times in the Old Testament is to *fulfill, pay, make good* on your promises. Psalm 50:14, “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and *pay* your vows to the Most High.”

- Then, a predominant usage expresses a sense of *well being*, being in *harmony*. The majority of those uses describe a state which results from God being involved.

- And, of course, there was that sense of well being that became a greeting, the equivalent of “Hello” and “Goodbye,” which has continued to our day.

The overall sense, then, is that of being complete, whole, in harmony, being fulfilled. It is much more than freedom from noise or anxiety; freedom from or the ending of war. It is an inner state, a quality of relationships that people value and want.

But how do we go *from here to there*? From the shaking and shattering turbulence to peace? To answer this question we turn to...

The Provision: The Savior Born For Us, Christ The Lord.

The Prince of Peace came to earth, but not as most expected. We know the gospels' accounts of Jesus' birth did not match what most people expected for the Messiah's arrival on scene.

- Mary and Joseph were in David's line, but not recognized as anything remotely like royalty.
- When the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in her womb, Mary and Joseph were betrothed, but the marriage process was not completed.
- Apparently they were not well-connected, because no close or distant relatives in Bethlehem took them in when they came to register for the tax.
- God the Father did provide an unusual birth announcement by an angel, however, it was to low class shepherds. The spectacular mass choir praising God was also to those looked-down-on shepherds.
- And then, yes, later some *Gentiles*, the magi, came and presented their precious gifts to Jesus, whom they recognized as the One “born King of the Jews.”
- All of this happened in a way that no person then or now would have scripted.

But even more unexpected than the way was the *nature* of God's provision of the Messiah, the One bringing His peace. Turn to John's Christmas story, chapter 1 in the gospel. 1:1-5,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

Now verse 14, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Forget about...

- a stable instead of a palace;
- the lowing of cattle and bleating of sheep instead of the sweet songs of court singers;
- the smell of manure instead of the fragrance of perfume.

Who could ever have expected *this*?

But what is this about “*the Word?*” The first thing we think of is what we say, our words. In Greek culture, going back 500 years before Christ, the term was used philosophically to refer not only to words, but to thoughts, thinking and reason. Some used it to refer to a divine or abstract reason that controlled and directed our world. Plato said, “It may be that some day there will come forth from God a Word, who will reveal all the mysteries and make everything plain.”

What God is telling us through John is that, yes, this has happened! Eternal God the Son came. He who is the true, eternal creator God, and true man. The Old Testament has statements about the Messiah which to us point clearly to the Messiah being more than just a man. But to the average first century person in Israel, this was not an expectation or even on the radar screen at all. *God Himself came to earth in human form to bring His peace.* The prince of peace came to earth, but not as most expected.

As well, Jesus brought peace to earth but, again, not as most expected. To the Jews in first century Israel the focus of peace was on the Messiah King who would free them from Roman rule, restore their independence and bring prosperity. Today we look for personal peace. Peace within and in our relationships. And, yes, many look for freedom from wars and threats of wars.

The peace which Christ brought to earth, the peace which transforms people and relationships, God’s peace, goes deeper. It addresses our deepest need, even though we don’t always recognize it. It is spiritual peace. It is peace with God, that then makes it possible for us to have unshakeable peace.

To state the obvious, we need to start at the beginning. Last Sunday evening we marked the beginning of Advent with a Service of Lessons and Carols. If you have never been part of one these services before, you may have been surprised that the First Reading was from Genesis 3 where, as the traditional summary states, “God tells sinful Adam that he has lost the life of Paradise and that his seed will bruise the serpent’s head.”

To *start at the beginning* is to go to our condition inherited from our parents and, indeed, from Adam. To our being sinners by nature and action who are unable to do anything about that on our own, try as we might. As Romans 3 tells us, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (23). And in chapter 6, “the wages of sin is death” (23). It is impossible to be *good enough*, to do enough *good* to change that, for chapter 3 declares, “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in [God’s] sight” (20). As James wrote, “whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (2:10).

But what we cannot do, God can do, and has done. The great choir proclamation in Luke

2:14, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace* among men with whom He is pleased” declares this fact. Titus 3:5, “[God] saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” Ephesians 2,

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (4-9)

And so we can have peace with God, peace within. As the opening verse of Romans 5 tells us, “... being justified by faith we have *peace* with God *through* our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 2:14, again, tells us that Jesus, “... Himself is our peace...” There is a good summary in Colossians 1, starting at verse 19,

“For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through [Christ] to reconcile all things to Himself, having made *peace* through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” (19-20)

God has made the provision, and not in a way most people expected, with our *being better* and *doing better* thinking.

There is one more important aspect of this: actually experiencing, knowing, feeling God’s peace. Paul’s prayer and God’s desire for every believer is that we would have God’s “peace in every circumstance” (2 Thessalonians 3:16). Colossians 3:15 tells us to “Let the peace of Christ rule in [our] hearts ...” But how do we do that, “in every circumstance?” While God’s peace is His gift to us, we have responsibilities for enjoying it, allowing it to bloom, to rule. Very briefly, turn to Phlipians 4.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. *And the peace of God*, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

God says, “Rejoice in my all the time, be gentle. Choose not to be anxious, but bring your requests to Me, being thankful that I hear you, and My peace will guard your heart and mind, will guard you to the core of your being.”

Continuing in Philippians 4,

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, *practice* these things, *and* the *God of peace* will be with you.” (4-9)

So, in addition to rejoicing, being gentle, trusting not being anxious, keep your mind focused on God’s truth, not just to know it but living it and in addition to God’s peace standing guard over you, God Himself will be with you.

Conclusion.

Peace on earth? Yes, Christ brings true, everlasting peace to earth, to each one who receives His gift. Do you recall the story of the last soldier to surrender after World War II? This soldier and four others had been left in the Philippines in 1944 with the order to carry on the mission even if their country surrendered. One soldier surrendered in 1950. Another was killed in a skirmish in 1954, and another in 1972. And so this last soldier continued the war alone.

He ignored messages from loudspeakers and leaflets telling him to surrender so he could go home. Over the years thousands of men and a great deal of money were used to try to locate him and convince him to end his war. Finally, on March 10, 1974, almost 30 years after World War II ended, he surrendered after receiving a personal order from his former commander. Finally, the war was over and he could go home. So many years without enjoying the peace that had already come.

Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ came to earth bringing God’s peace. Have you accepted God’s peace? Have you placed your faith in Christ and now know you are at peace with God and have the peace of God in your heart? If not, don’t go through another year, another day without God’s peace. Come to Him today.

For those who have received God’s gift of peace, as you spend a few moments with Him now, thank Him for Jesus and His peace. You have peace with God. Determine to let the peace of Christ rule in your heart today, during this Christmas season, and every day. Be an ambassador of Christ’s peace. There is no better gift you can give to people who are not yet at peace with God than the message of God’s peace through Jesus Christ.

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