

## A Season of Peace

For the next couple weeks, we are meditating on some of the rich biblical truths associated with Christmas. It's a season of love in cold world, light in a dark world, hope in a hopeless world. Last week we talked about how it's a season of promise in a world full of broken promises. This morning let's see how Jesus' birth promises us peace in a war-torn world.

<sup>6</sup> *While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

<sup>8</sup> *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

<sup>13</sup> *Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

<sup>14</sup> *"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." – Luke 2:6-14*

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon<sup>l</sup> his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince  
of Peace.*

<sup>7</sup> *Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end – Isa. 9:6-7*

Alfred Nobel woke up one morning, opened his newspaper, and began to read his own obituary. Nobel was a chemist, businessman, and inventor whose inventions included a substance he briefly considered naming Nobel's Safety Powder but decided instead to name it dynamite, after the Greek word for "power". His invention dynamite enabled armies to wage war on a whole new level of destruction. So when his brother Ludwig died, news organizations mistakenly reported that he had died. One headline summed up what all his obituaries said: *The merchant of death is dead*. Nobel became concerned about how he would be remembered, and established the Nobel Prizes, including the Nobel Peace Prize.

Human history is full of war. It is estimated that of the last 3400 years, the world has only been warless for 268 or 8% of those years. It is estimated over 100 million people lost their lives in war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone. The lives taken in war over the course of human history may be nearly a billion lives. We've heard the saying "to err is human" but maybe it should be "to war is human".

Woven into the Christmas season is the promise of peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and Isaiah predicted that of the increase *and the peace* of his government there would be no end. The angels announced that the birth of Jesus meant peace on earth to those on whom God's favor rests. Jesus came to bring the peace this world seeks but can never find.

And he brings this peace one heart at a time. Cause the source of war and peace is found in the heart. Jesus came to give us peace in three directions: upward, outward, and inward...

## 1. **Peace with God**

Peace going upward toward God. When the angels suddenly appear in the night sky declaring glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom favor rests, they are rejoicing over the peace this baby will bring between God and man. This implies there wasn't peace between God and man before.

So far there have been two wars in history that have been designated "world wars". A world war is defined as a war in which all or most of the principle nations of the world are engaged in.

By that definition there have been three world wars and the one that isn't recorded in the history books is actually the most comprehensive and destructive world war of them all. The Bible tells us that the result of sin entering the human race is that the entire world is engaged in a war against God. We aren't born friends of God, or even neutral towards God. Sin has made us all enemies of God, hostile to God, angry with God. Our hearts naturally hate God. We were at war with God, and God was at war with us.

Jesus came to end that war.

On that first Christmas morning God became a man to end that war and make peace between God and man. Think with me for a moment what Jesus did. He revealed to us through his life and teaching and miracles who God is. He displayed the heart of the Father, and sinners were touched by His mercy and fell in love with His goodness. And then Jesus, as God incarnate, fully God, fully Man, stood in the middle of the war between God and man. Men poured out their hatred for God by crucifying him, God poured out His hatred for sin by exhausting it upon His beloved Son. Hated and rejected by men, loved by God but punished as though he were God's enemy, Jesus was shot at by both sides! Three days later God raised Jesus from the dead as a powerful affirmation that Jesus accomplished peace between man and God.

Now the Bible promises that for everyone who trusts in Jesus and his substitutionary death the war is ended. We are forgiven, accepted, reconciled, and loved by God. We have peace with God – what our hearts longed for and needed most of all. *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.*

## 2. **Peace with one another**

Peace going outward to others. We live in a war-torn world. Not just nation against nation, but person against person. The same sin that made us at war against God also has us at war against one another. All around us there are conflicts, arguments, fights, and damaged relationships. You have them. I have them.

Maybe a conflict comes right to mind this morning. It could be a fresh argument you had on the way to church. Or it could be a conflict that has been going on as long as you can remember. There are war-torn families. I knew a father whose two sons hadn't talked to him for years. He'd reach out to them but last I heard they refused any contact with him. I don't blame them, he had hurt them deeply.

Wars, fights, and conflicts come in all shapes and sizes – but they all come from one source. The source of every conflict, every fight, every broken relationship, every war on earth is our war with God.

One day when Jesus the Prince of Peace returns to establish his kingship over the earth there will be no more wars, or conflicts, or broken relationships. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.

Until then, as Jesus brings peace between us and God, he also brings peace to our relationships by helping us grow in his love, grace, and forgiveness. Love because many of the conflicts in our lives can be avoided when we allow Jesus to fill our hearts with his love so what we do and what we say are truly motivated by love. Love asks, *what's best for that person? How can I do them good? How can I avoid hurting them?* The more Jesus' love rules our hearts the more we will spend ourselves for the benefit of others rather than in selfish pursuits.

Grace because Jesus came to give grace upon grace. Wave after wave, God's grace keeps pouring out on us through Jesus. When Jesus sits on the throne of our hearts, he overflows us with the same grace towards others that he has shown to us. We are all in different places, different levels of maturity, we have different convictions, we have different strengths and different weaknesses. We are tempted by different things. If we don't have grace ruling in our hearts, it's easy to begin judging one another in self-righteousness. "I wouldn't ever do that." "Why is he/she so...?" "How can they say they're a Christian when they do that?"

When we do that, we're forgetting how much grace Jesus shows *us* every single day! I haven't gotten to the place where I need a trickle of grace, I need grace upon grace every single day. So do you, I don't care how long you've been walking with the Lord or how spiritual you are. As Jesus rules our hearts, we extend to others the grace he gives to us.

And forgiveness because our entire relationship with God is only possible because He has forgiven us in Christ, and He commands (not asks, commands) us to forgive as we have been forgiven. There will be hurts in our lives, people will unintentionally or intentionally hurt us, disappoint us, oppose us, maybe even betray us. That can shatter our peace. And sometimes there's nothing we can do to make that relationship right. But Jesus helps us to forgive, and that can restore peace to our hearts if not to the relationship. Forgiveness releases the other person from the pain they've caused us. We don't hold it against them. We don't seek revenge. We don't want to hurt them. And we don't turn that hurt over in our minds again and again and again. Forgiveness may not change a thing about the other person, but it can have a tremendous affect on our hearts replacing bitterness with peace.

### **3. Peace with ourselves**

This is peace going inward, peace within ourselves, peace within our hearts. It's amazing how much warfare can go on right here in our hearts. Sin not only causes us to war with God, but the Bible says that sin wars within the members of our body. We are at war with ourselves!

Jesus brings peace between us and God, and that brings peace to our hearts. That peace is available, but it's not automatic. Our hearts can be whipped up like the winds and waves that the disciples faced as they crossed the Sea of Galilee such that, not only aren't we at peace, we can feel overwhelmed, like the

winds and waves are going to swamp our boats. Just as Jesus spoke to the wind and waves saying “peace, be still” he speaks peace to our hearts, if we will allow him to.

- Fears, worries, and anxieties whip our hearts into a frenzy– Jesus says “do not fear, I am with you.”
- Stress overwhelms us with a sense that we can’t handle life – Jesus says, “my grace is sufficient for you”
- Guilt gnaws away at our conscience, reminding us of our sin. Jesus speaks to guilt and says, “you are forgiven. You can have a clean conscience for I have washed it in my blood.”
- Regret has our hearts living in a past we can’t change, telling us our future can’t be good because of mistakes we made in the past – Jesus says, “I know the plans I have for you, plans for good and not for harm. Plans to give you a hope and a future.”

I don’t know what wars may be going on in your heart, or what winds and waves are threatening to swamp your life. I’ve noticed a particular fear that’s been creeping into my heart over the past couple weeks. It’s a vague, faceless fear, not one that I can take tangible steps to deal with. But I have noticed it whipping up my heart, winds getting stronger, waves getting larger.

Jesus is our Prince of Peace and he lives in our hearts. He has the power to speak to the winds and the waves, peace, be still, and they must obey him. Ask Jesus to speak peace to whatever is going on in your heart and trust him to do it. This Christmas season, do what Mary did. After all the noise and excitement of Jesus’ birth, with bright lights and angels appearing and shepherds running in and excitedly telling her and Joseph all they had heard, after all this activity, Mary quieted herself, held Jesus, and treasured up all these things in her heart. Take some quiet time to quiet yourself, be with Jesus, and treasure his promises and his peace in your heart.

Slow down and let that sink in. Do you need peace this morning? Is there some conflict going on, either with someone else or within yourself? Jesus was born to bring peace to all who will trust in him. Peace with God, peace with one another, and peace in our own hearts. Let’s trust him for that as we pray together.