



Peace on Earth

Luke 2:1-14

December 23, 2018

This morning we are going to talk about peace. Often around the holidays you will see the phrase “peace on earth” plastered all over on various Christmas cards and Christmas decorations. This idea of “peace on earth” is an idea that almost everyone can agree with, whether they are a Christ-follower or not. Sandra Bullock stars in a movie called, “Miss Congeniality.” The movie is about her role as an undercover cop who competes in a beauty pageant in an effort to solve a crime. If you watch this link <https://youtu.be/B1ZOWwW2agQ>, then you’ll see how each beauty contestant answers the question: “What is the one most important thing our society needs?” “World Peace” is everyone’s answer. One of the most important things that our society needs is peace. Even Sandra Bullock agrees! Seriously though, an absence of peace is all too easy to find. There is often fighting in our homes, our workplaces, our schools, and around the globe. SO MANY people have not been able to find peace on this earth. We could all use a little more peace in our lives. But, how do we find peace on this earth? We’re going to talk about that today as we take a closer look at Luke 2:1-14. **Please stop reading this transcript, and take a minute to read it now.**

If ever there is a time for “peace on earth,” it’s Christmastime! It’s a time to set aside our crazy, busy, distracted lives and think about the things that matter most. It’s a time to set aside our petty quarrels, to bury the hatchet for a few days, and to TRY to just all get along.¹ But a lot of the peace that we enjoy around Christmastime is a shallow peace. It’s a hollow, fragile peace that will easily crumble apart, a day or two after Christmas. IF it even lasts that long. We all want to have peace on earth, peace in our relationships, peace in our homes, and... peace in our own inner selves. But peace can be elusive, even when we just try to experience it for a few short days around Christmas. Sometimes our efforts to embrace “peace on earth” end up backfiring and revealing just how much our lives are really not at peace. I don’t mean to be a downer here. But I do want us to reflect on this important question: what is keeping us from having genuine, lasting peace in our lives?

There are 2 keys to finding peace on this earth. Here’s the first key:

1. Finding peace on this earth begins by finding peace with God. Luke 2:14 declares, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and **on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.**”² One Christmas, I can’t remember how long ago now, I remember being struck by the beauty and sobriety of this verse. We were reading the classic Christmas story from Luke 2, the one we just read, when I realized that, as beautiful as this verse is for us as Christ-followers, it is also sobering. This idea of “peace on earth” is ONLY for those on whom God’s favor rests. But, it’s NOT for everyone who lives on planet earth. That’s the sobering part. God’s favor does not rest on everyone. Thus, not everyone will have peace. This, of course, begs the question, how do we each make sure that we are among this favored group? How do we ensure that God’s peace is to US, toward US, that it’s in OUR lives?

Let’s dig into this idea of “peace.” Peace is about being free from fighting and conflict in our lives. It’s about quiet and tranquility.³ It’s also a freedom from worry and anxiety. To put it in my own words, peace is when our soul is at rest; it’s when our inner self is completely content and at ease. It’s actually a bit challenging to frame precisely what we mean by peace. Regardless, we all know it’s something very good and VERY desirable. Peace is “a state of well-being.”⁴

¹ The figurative expression ‘burying the hatchet’ is different in that it did originate as an American Indian tradition. Hatchets were buried by the chiefs of tribes when they came to a peace agreement. Google.

² This verse is actually a very short hymn from the early church. It’s sometimes referred to as the “Gloria in Excelsis Deo” based on the words from the Latin Vulgate translation. It simply means “Glory to God in the Highest.” See footnote in *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1704. In fact, this is actually 1 of 4 birth narrative hymns preserved in Luke. See additional footnote in *NIV Study Bible* on p. 1702, referring to Luke 1:46-55.

³ See Google.

⁴ The Greek word is εἰρήνη = “a state of well-being, peace... since, according to the prophets, peace will be an essential characteristic of the messianic kingdom ... Christian thought also frequently regards εἰρήνη as nearly synonymous with messianic salvation εὐαγγελίζεσθαι εἰρήνην “proclaim peace,” i.e.

To be more specific though, the verses that precede verse 14 are talking about peace as it is related to the birth of Jesus. Luke 2:10-11 says, "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.'"⁵ Therefore, this "peace on earth," as related to Jesus, is specifically linked to the Good News. Peace is being proclaimed because of a particular event in history >>> the birth of the Messiah. This peace comes through the salvation that will be provided by the Messiah. God's peace is found by those who find salvation. God's favor is on those who place faith in Jesus the Messiah.

Earlier we read how verse 14 limited "peace on earth" only to those on whom God's favor rests. But here, in verse 10, it declares the "good news that will cause great joy for ALL the people." So, which one is it? Well, as it turns out, the phrase "all the people" may actually be Luke's way of making a particular reference to Israel. And yet, at the same time, Luke IS also trying to communicate something very inclusive here.⁶ When the angels announced this amazing good news, they announced it to the shepherds.⁷ This demonstrates that this good news was for anyone, despite their financial, social, or religious position.⁸ It would be wrong for us to conclude from v. 14, that Jesus was born into this world just so that He could bless the elite and the privileged. Luke makes it clear that Jesus also came for the average, everyday kind of person.⁹ People like the shepherds, just the common working class.¹⁰ From the highest of kings, to the lowest of peasants, the Messiah makes salvation and peace with God, available to us all.¹¹ Therefore, each one of us has a personal opportunity to respond with joy at Christmas! This "peace on earth" that the angels are singing about in verse 14 is a peace that God offers to anyone and everyone who will receive Christ as their Savior and Lord. The words that the angel declared in verse 10 are indeed "good news that will cause great joy for all [kinds of] people."

Most of us would like to just jump right into finding peace in our day to day struggles. But, if we genuinely want a lasting peace, it must begin by understanding that we are enemies with God Himself. And THIS is our most urgent priority. You might be thinking, wait a minute, I'm not God's enemy! What did I ever do to make God my enemy? But the thing we sometimes fail to recognize is that we are born into sin. No one had to teach us how to be selfish or how to be mean to others. We come by it naturally, as part of our own human nature.

That's why there is such a lack of peace on this earth. People all around us, and all around the world, are not at peace with each other BECAUSE they are not at peace with God. Sin is in control of our lives. It causes us to misbehave. And, it causes us to deny God and to distance ourselves from God. Sin causes us to want to be in control of our own lives; to live whatever way WE want to live. But living our own way, leads to death. There's an Old Testament Proverb (14:12) that says, "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death." There are two ways that we can live

messianic salvation." Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 288). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁵ "This narrative may be called, The history of the first preaching of the gospel upon earth." Lange, J. P., & van Oosterzee, J. J. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Luke*. (P. Schaff & C. C. Starbuck, Trans.) (p. 37). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁶ Many commentators agree that, "Luke envisioned the gospel as being for all people, including the Gentiles (Acts 15:1-29; 18:10); but here, as in 3:21; 7:29; 8:47, the people of Israel were primarily in Luke's mind." Stein, R. H. (1992). *Luke* (Vol. 24, p. 108). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁷ It will not seem without significance, to any who appreciate the symbolic element of the Scriptures, that the first announcement was made to shepherds. Jehovah had Himself borne the name of the shepherd of Israel, and the Messiah had been announced under this designation by the prophets (Ps. 23; Ezek. 34). David had pastured his flocks in this very neighborhood; and since the rich and mighty in Jerusalem were looking only for an earthly deliverer, it was undoubtedly among these humble shepherds that the poor in spirit and the mourners would be found, to whom the Lord Himself afterwards addressed His own preaching." Lange, J. P., & van Oosterzee, J. J. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Luke*. (P. Schaff & C. C. Starbuck, Trans.) (p. 37). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁸ See comments by William Hendriksen in *The Gospel of Luke (New Testament Commentary)*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1978, p. 152.

⁹ See discussion by Darrell L. Bock in *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, p. 87.

¹⁰ One author writes, "It is a wonderful thing that the story should tell that the first announcement of God came to some shepherds... It was to simple men of the fields that God's message first came." He goes on to theorize that it is quite possible "that these shepherds were in charge of the flocks from which [some of] the Temple offerings were chosen. It is a lovely thought that the shepherds who looked after Temple lambs were the first to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Barclay, William, *The Gospel of Luke, Rev. Ed.*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1975, pp. 22-23. See also 1 Corinthians 1:26-27.

¹¹ "The announcement of this truth to the shepherds, indirectly intimates, that other pious Israelites were soon to hear from THEM of the birth of their King." Lange, J. P., & van Oosterzee, J. J. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Luke*. (P. Schaff & C. C. Starbuck, Trans.) (p. 36). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

our lives. Either we can choose to be in charge or we can let God be in charge: our God who created us, who loves us, and who leads/teaches us the best way to enjoy a good and peace-filled life.

We often try to convince ourselves that we've got life all figured out. But then, the hurts and disappointments and stresses of life hit us like a ton of bricks. It's in those moments, that we need to come to our senses. And it's in those moments when we need to seek God's favor. Here's the good news: this Christmas story is NOT just a nice story to make us feel warm and gooey inside (like a good Christmas cookie!). Christmas is an historical event. Because God loves us, He sent a Savior. This Savior is Jesus and He is the Messiah, one who was specially sent to deal with our sin problem by later dying on the cross. So, the price for our peace was His death. But Jesus gladly laid down His life. Jesus came to earth to bring peace between us and God. But we can't have that peace until God's favor rests on us. The way we find God's favor, the way we make peace with God, is by putting our trust in what Jesus did on the cross.

This, then changes, everything. We are transformed from God's enemy to God's friend. Romans 5:1-2 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand..." And so "peace with God" is more than just a subjective feeling, it is also "an objective status, a new relationship with God."¹² We go from living our lives apart from God and against God, to living our lives with God and for God. And we discover peace. Amazing, incredible, much needed peace for our very souls. Finding "peace on this earth" begins by finding peace with God. If you've not yet found this peace, make sure you talk with someone today.

Once we've found peace with God, peace for our own souls, that still leaves a whole world around us, that's often filled with conflict and anxiety. So how do we find peace, amidst all the people and problems in this world? This brings us to the second key to finding peace:

2. Finding peace on this earth broadens as we grow closer to God. Finding peace in our day to day struggles will take some time. It will take some maturity and spiritual growth. But, over time, real peace will broaden into every single area of our lives. Let's look at Luke 2:14 once again. The angels declare, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and **on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.**" You see, once we find peace with God, His favor then continues to rest on us. And the longer we remain in His favor, and let Him grow us and develop us into godly people, the stronger and wiser and healthier we become as people. God begins to chisel off our rough edges and to heal our deep inner wounds. He forms us and re-fashions us over time, to become more and more the people that He intends us to be.¹³

However, and this is significant, just because we find our own personal peace with God, that doesn't mean we will suddenly be at peace with everyone around us. There are many people and circumstances, that are far from the peace of God. In fact, Christ-followers are given some vital counsel in Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." We can only do our part, the part that depends on us. We can't control or force other people into peace. The fact is, until other people mature in their own walk with God, they may continue to struggle to be at peace with the people and problems in their own life.¹⁴

Jesus said it this way in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." We find an amazing peace in Jesus, but we will still have trouble in this world. However, whatever that trouble may be, now or into the future, Jesus gives us His reassurance that in Him we CAN have genuine, lasting peace. As believers in Christ, we have access to genuine, lasting peace. Not a peace that is

¹² *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1896.

¹³ He also makes us His temple, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit, in turn, produces spiritual fruit like that mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, PEACE, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control..." Notice that PEACE is one of the fruits in this list.

¹⁴ This explains Jesus' challenging words in Luke 12:51-53, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

fabricated around the holidays, where everyone puts on a happy plastic smile for a few days. Rather, the deep, soul-sustaining peace that comes from God.¹⁵

As we grow closer to God, one of the amazing things that happens, is that we become more and more like Him, and we begin to reflect His peacemaking character. In fact, one of the things He leads us to do, is to become peacemakers.¹⁶ Matthew 5:9 says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” You see, as we grow closer and closer to God, we not only begin to experience more and more peace in the midst of our own problems, but we also become peacemakers on this earth. In the coming week, many of us will have the beautiful privilege of being a peaceful presence at various holiday gatherings. We will be placed in challenging situations, but we will have the ability, through Christ, to promote the peace of God to those around us.

There is a beautiful prayer for peace that is often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. May this be our prayer today:

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

This prayer reflects the goodness and majesty of God. He transforms us, from people who were once His enemies, into people who are now His peacemakers on this earth. Jesus is worthy of our devotion. He brings us into peace with God. He brings us into peace with one another. He offers us a peace that passes understanding, even for our own toughest problems. And, He transforms us into peacemakers on this earth. Because of all He’s done for us and because of all He is still doing for us and through us every day, He is worthy of our worship this Christmas.

Jesus is the one who brings “peace on earth!”

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
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¹⁵ Each time we bring our anxieties to God, it invites His peace into those situations. A favorite Christmas verse for many people is Isaiah 9:6, “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.” Indeed, He is our Prince of Peace!

¹⁶ See James 3:17-18.