

“Real Peace”

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It was foretold 800 years before the first Christmas:

The prophet wrote:

“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. Isaiah 9:6

Among other things, **peace** was prophesied.

And then on that Christmas night the angel declared to the shepherds:

“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord... Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” Luke 2:10-14

And so again, **peace** was announced.

And now 2000 more years have elapsed and most are still waiting for peace.

Wouldn't it be nice if...

- the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan would end.
- the Palestinians and Israelis could get along.
- the genocide in Myanmar would stop.
- the abuse of women and children worldwide would come to an end.

Wouldn't it be nice if hostility, enmity, and anger would end and peace would prevail among nations, peoples, in neighborhoods and in homes?

And so once a year the Western world slows down enough to long for such peace.

We make “happy” for a few days singing of “Sleigh bells” and “Walking in a winter wonderland.”

And wishfully sounding out to one another: “Have yourself a merry little Christmas, Let your heart be light. From now on, our troubles will be out of sight.”

Christmas has become synonymous with people not just being tolerant of each other but nice and even generous.

Annually we stop and ask as the infamous Rodney King remarked in the midst of the Los Angeles riots in 1991, “Why can't we all just get along.”

And so we love to tell “Hallmark” stories old and new of how people, on Christmas, managed to lay down animosities and come together for a season.

It is like a truce in a battle – an hiatus from the way we usually think of and treat others.

But within days it's over; we're back to “the same old same old.”

Even among Christians, our impression of Christmas can become skewed by a sentimentality imposed on it.

“Silent night, holy, calm, tender, sleep, sleep in heavenly peace.”

“Stars look(ing) down, cattle lowing, no crying, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.”

Babies, soft light, hushed singing, peace, peace on earth.

And so we sing and we wait.

In this, do we merely join the rest of the world in a certain kind of “fiction?”

Is it simply as Alexander Pope wrote that, “Hope springs eternal in the human breast?”

Is Christmas “peace” merely wishful thinking?

Did we miss something; did we misunderstand?

To make matters worse, this meek and mild Jesus of whom we love to sing at Christmas said this:

Matthew 10:34 **“Do not suppose that that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.”**

1 John 3:8 “for this reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”

Hebrews 2:14 “that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

Really? How does that fit with our concept of Christmas peace?

Earlier I spoke of the sentimentality we impose on Christmas and I quoted from a couple of favorite Christmas Carols.

But on the whole our Christmas songs are more balanced, than most of us, in their understanding of reality.

The songwriters, reflecting the Bible, knew the severity of the problems we face.

“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”

From **our fears and sins** release us

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

“Disperse the **gloomy clouds of night and death’s dark shadows** put to flight.

Bid **envy, strife and quarrels** cease

“It Came upon the Midnight Clear”

“And ye, beneath **life’s crushing load**, whose forms are bending low, who **toil along the climbing way, with painful steps and slow,**

“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”

“And **in despair** I bowed my head: There is **no peace on earth I said, for hate is strong** and mocks the song of peace on earth, goodwill to men.

Christmas Carols are more realistic than we first thought; they speak of: Captivity, fears, sins, exile, death, sins crushing load, a curse, hate, painful toil, and sorrow.

As one man said, they describe “The default setting of our (fallen) human existence.” (Wilfred M. McClay “God Rest Ye Merry” in *Touchstone*, December 2006, 4)

Christmas is only truly good news because of how bad the bad news is.

The world tries to **camouflage** it for a season each year, but God came to **change** it.

Let me put Christmas in proper human experiential context once again:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and there was peace!

But the enemy of God, the Evil One, determined to destroy humanity.

And so at the instigation of that Enemy, sin entered the world and humanity through Adam and Eve – affecting every human heart and the attitudes and actions that flow from such hearts.

Humanity then moved quickly to destroy every vestige of God and righteousness.

According to Genesis 6:5 “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”

Sin and Satan, the ruler of this age (John 16:11), had conquered the world.

Sin and death reigned with all their attending evils.

But God wasn’t done; He called Abraham to start a family that would become a people, a people from whom eventually a Messiah would arise to deliver humanity from its sin and sinfulness – a Messiah who would break the grip that Satan and sin had on the world.

That Messiah, that Deliverer, turns out to be God himself in the person of his Son – Jesus – at that first Christmas.

Those who anticipated the Messiah thought he would be a human leader who would help overthrow oppressive rulers and restore peace and prosperity.

And most of us have followed their misguided understanding.

We continue today to assume that the right leaders, the right policies, and the right programs can usher in a golden age of peace.

But God came with a much more aggressive agenda.

He was not going to deal merely with externals – governments and laws.
God was going to deal with the root of the problem - Satan's evil hold on the world through the human heart.

God didn't merely send a living Christmas card to influence us to love one another.

He didn't just say, "Watch me and learn how to get along."

Go back to the verse with which I began:

God said, Luke 2:11 "Today in the town of David **a Savior** has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

A Savior – peace won't come until victory does.

That's why Jesus said, Matthew 10:34 "I did not come to bring peace but a sword."

The birth of Jesus was not about a sentimental peace but a real one.

He would bring victory over Satan, over sin, and over death itself.

And most amazing of all, he would accomplish that through his own death and resurrection.

I imagine, It didn't have to be that way.

God could have crushed Satan and sin and sinners but it would have been much like the saying: "**the surgery was successful but the patient died.**"

No, God determined a way to defeat Satan and sin **without destroying the sinner** – through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

On the Cross Jesus **defeated Satan:**

Colossians 2:15 "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross

On the Cross Jesus **removed the sin that alienates us from a holy God.**

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

On the Cross Jesus **defeated the power of sin to control us.**

Romans 6:6 "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin..."

On the Cross Jesus defeated **the curse that is on the world.**

Romans 8:21 “The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

On the Cross Jesus **defeated the power of death to destroy.**

1 Corinthians 15:25-26, “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death...

And on the Cross Jesus **destroyed the basis of human hostility** – changing our hearts - making real peace with one another a real possibility.

Ephesians 2:14,17 “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”

Real peace is through the death and resurrection of the Jesus who was born at Christmas.

But if Jesus accomplished all this, where is it?

Where is that peace?

Or, again, is this just the religious version of the same “fiction” that Santa Claus and Hallmark bring – saying “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace? (Jeremiah 6:14)

As I said earlier God has a much more aggressive agenda than merely creating a façade of peace.

On the Cross Jesus broke the power of sin and Satan.

Now the battle for peace is in the human heart – yours and mine.

For the human heart is ground-zero where Satan wages his war against God.

And unfortunately we willingly cooperate with him.

The prophets knew it: Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Jesus reiterated it: Matthew 15:19 “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

Don’t we know it to be true of our own hearts?

God said to Joseph in Matthew 1:21 “(Mary) will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will **save** his people from **their sins.**”

That’s where peace on earth begins!

Colossians 1:13-14 “For (God) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Cf Ephesians 1:4)

God is bringing about real peace, but one heart at a time.
Has he conquered your heart yet?

But is God’s plan working?
Will this “one heart at a time” bring about the change this world so desperately needs?

After 2000 years we begin to wonder if the world will ever change?
Some say, 2 Peter 3:4 “Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation”

But the Bible says, 2 Peter 3:8-9 “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance...”

From our perspective, the road from the First Advent to final “Peace on Earth” is a long one.

But I’m glad God has waited; you and I get to be part of what God is doing.

When we look for peace, we must first of all look for it in the right place – the human heart.

Is God changing your heart?

Look around you; is he changing the hearts of others?

I see evidence of God’s work at the ground zero of the human heart every day:

I see it in the forgiveness granted by some for some of the worst offenses committed by others.

I see it in the true generosity that extends beyond Christmas and beyond the affordable.

I see it in the softness of heart for the hurting and the lonely.
I see it in you as you care for each other.

God is at work changing hearts – one at a time and seemingly ever so slowly.

We choose to believe him, that he is doing exactly what he designed to do; and his timing is perfect.

So we do not lose heart but even more, we rejoice, God will finish what he has started.

The first advent, that first Christmas, was the invasion.
The Cross and Resurrection were the victory.
The 2nd Advent will be the culmination.

Think about the joy of that first Christmas:

I don't know what some thought on that first Christmas but we have hints that they knew this was not just a change of government, a change of administration; this was something far bigger than that!

Mary sang about how this was the miraculous and powerful fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

Zechariah prophesied it was about the forgiveness of sins and "to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death... to guide our feet into the way of peace."

The angels knew – They sang, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased."

Simeon blessed the child Jesus, and said, "my eyes have seen your salvation that you prepared for all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to y our people Israel."

Some of them "got it!"

God had ushered in the beginning of the end of Satan's reign of terror and the beginning of the new age of the Kingdom of God.

How much more do we, on this side of the cross and resurrection, see what God was doing AND is doing.

Let's believe Him and sing for Joy.