

Where is that Peace the Angels Promised?

Luke 2:8-14

The Church of the Covenant

December 31, 2017

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

I. Intro: the Disastrous Christmas Dinner

I will never forget that Christmas day about 15 years ago, when I tried to show my younger siblings how to serve the perfect Christmas dinner. I was already exhausted from staying up way too late on Christmas Eve wrapping presents. I was stressed about the meal, and about being perfect. And while I was trying to cook, my young nephews were having a sword fight in the living room between the Christmas tree and the glass angels.

I had calculated and written down a schedule so that everything would be done at the same time. My brother, two sisters, their spouses, all of our children, and my Dad were all sitting around the dining room table expectantly waiting for the meal they had been smelling for hours. I carved the first slice out of that beautiful roast beef, only to discover, to my horror, that it was still raw in the middle. I was stressed beyond the breaking point, and when I saw that the roast was still raw, I cracked. I ran into the kitchen and burst into tears.

Where was that peace the Christmas angels promised? Was it only a lovely story? Were the Old Testament prophecies just wishful thinking? Is it really possible to have true peace in our lives?

Let's go back to our Bibles to see what *God* says about peace.

II. Definition of Peace

In the **Old Testament**, *peace* or *shalom* referred to material prosperity and a state of calm & tranquility without any anxiety or stress. *Shalom* involves everything that makes for a person's highest good concerning their external well-being. The Jewish people believed that peace meant the absence of military conflict and freedom from captivity and oppression.

It was the prophet Isaiah who declared

*"To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end."*¹

In the **New Testament**, peace comes through a personal relationship with God, made possible by the saving work of Jesus Christ. Peace includes both the spiritual peace of reconciliation with God, and the absence of conflict among people. The peace that Jesus gives his followers is perfect and everlasting. Peace is one of the Fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5 – meaning that peace is one of the characteristics of a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit and trusts God completely with all aspects of their lives.

III. The Angels sing of Peace

Our Christmas hymns all use the KJV, "*Peace on earth, goodwill to men,*" based on a Latin version of the angel song. More accurate translations from the original Greek have determined that Luke 2 verse 14 should read "*on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.*"

That first Christmas Eve the angels sang about the coming of a savior, but Jesus was not going to bring the peace the Jewish people were hoping for. He was not a military warrior who came to overthrow the oppressive Roman occupation of Israel or bring an end to slavery.

IV. Jesus' promise of Peace

Instead, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, brought the gift of grace. He was born in Bethlehem and 33 years later died on the cross to take the punishment for sin. When God touches our hearts and we confess our sins to Him, we are cleansed from all unrighteousness and by grace receive the gift of peace with God through faith in Christ the Lord.

This is the kind of peace that Jesus promised to his disciples when he said:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.”²

The peace of God is deep and lasting, a peace of mind and soul made possible by the Savior. It does not depend on your circumstances. It is an inner peace which eliminates worry and fear. It protects your heart and mind, preventing anxiety from taking over. This is “*the Peace of Christ which passes all understanding.*”³

It is based on trust in God's sovereignty and wisdom. Even when your world falls apart, a spouse leaves, a parent or child dies, even in the midst of hurricanes, fires, floods or violence, even if you lose your job or your health or your home, when you dwell in the peace of God you have the confident assurance that all will be well.

V. Application

Are you wondering how you can have that kind of peace in your life?

First of all, have you *accepted* God's gift of grace, or are you still burdened by nagging guilt for the things you did in the past? Do you have memories of things you did that you regret? What causes you to feel shame? Are you disappointed by your inability to live a good Christian life? Do you realize that no matter how hard you try, you'll never be “good enough” to deserve God's approval? All of us sin daily and fall short of what God created us to be. No one is perfect.

Once you realize that your sins have been forgiven and you have a new and joyous relationship with your heavenly Father, his peace begins to filter into your everyday life.

After my emotional over-reaction on that Christmas Day when I ruined the roast, I realized that I had forgotten to spend time with the Lord all week. In the stress and busy-ness of the holiday I had never stopped to read the Bible or to pray, or to spend time with the Lord. No wonder my peace had vanished.

VI. By reading the Bible.

If you long to experience that Peace of Christ that passes all understanding, start by spending some time each day getting to know God better by reading your Bible. Make and keep a New Year's resolution to read through the entire Bible in 2018, because that will help you to learn how God loves His people and how over time His plans worked for good in their lives. You will grow to be more peaceful knowing that all that happens in your life is according to God's plan and will ultimately work for good in your life.

VII. *By praying*

Reading your Bible is how God talks to you; Prayer is how you can talk to God. Pastor Chuck Swindoll wrote, “prayer is the single most significant thing that will help turn inner turmoil into peace.”⁴ You can talk to God about everything the way you talk to a best friend. Tell God about your job. Talk with Him about your children and your grandchildren and your parents. Praise Him for His goodness. Keep a prayer journal of things you’ve prayed for, and how those prayers were answered. The more you pray, the better you will know God. As you see God acting in your life and meeting your needs, it becomes easier to trust Him, and with the trust comes peace!

I read a story about a man whose daughter had been in an accident at high school. She had fallen, something snapped in her back, just below the neck, and her arms and legs were numb.

Chuck Swindoll wrote, “I raced to the school alone, not knowing what I’d find or how seriously our daughter had been injured. En route, I prayed aloud. I called out to the Lord like a child trapped in an empty well. I told Him I would need Him for several things: to touch my daughter, to give me strength, to provide skill and wisdom to the paramedics. Tears were near the surface, so I asked him to calm me, to restrain the growing sense of panic within me.”

“As I drove and prayed, I sensed the most incredible realization of God’s presence. It was almost eerie. The pulse that had been thumping in my throat returned to normal. ... Normally I would have been borderline out of control. I wasn’t. Normally I would have been shouting for the crowd to back away or for the ambulance driver to get her to the hospital immediately! I didn’t. ... I followed the ambulance in my car, sensing again the Spirit’s profound and sovereign presence.”

Chuck ends his story saying, “It was Amazing! God the Holy Spirit filled me, took full control, gave great grace, calmed fears, and ultimately brought wonderful healing to my daughter Charissa’s back. Today she is a healthy, happy wife and mother of two.”⁵

That is what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote in his letter to the Philippians:

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

God promises His peace to us, too, no matter what our circumstances may be. God loves you so much that he willingly sent His Son to earth as a baby. Jesus shared our life on earth, and was crucified to take the punishment for our sins. God’s gift to you for the New Year is a Savior, born in the city of David and laid in a manger. He is Christ the Lord, and over time he will fill your life with Peace when you invite Him into your heart.

As we enter the New Year, give to God all of your worries, anxieties and fears. Let God handle them. Then listen for the echo of the song the Christmas angels sang:
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

May you be blessed with God’s Peace in this New Year. Amen.

¹ Isaiah 9:6-7

² John 14:27.

³ Phil 4:7

⁴ Chuck Swindoll, *Strengthening Your Grip*; p. 148 & p. 157

⁵ *Contemporary Illustrations*; “Holy Spirit” #96, p. 106.
from *Flying Closer to the Flame* by Charles Swindoll, 1993.