

Christmas in Biblical Perspective: Peace?

Luke 2:8-20

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December 24, 2012–11:00 p.m. Sermon

We will look at Luke 2:8-20. I can't think of a better way to think of the Christmas celebration than to gather together with the people of God and look at the Word of God and then come to His Table, communing with Him. Luke 2:8-20 says

[8] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" [15] When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." [16] And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. [17] And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. [18] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. [19] But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. [20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

May God richly bless the reading of His Word.

I think of this service each year at Christmas and this passage comes to mind. I think of what Mary did that night. She treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. That's my view in a sense of this service, when we get to come together and worship our heavenly Father. Christmas is such a special time, a unique time. It's a time of gathering together with friends, family and having parties. You get to spend time with family and you're a little nicer even to that

particular family member at Christmas to some degree. People are a little nicer at Christmas. Christmas is different. There is something different about Christmas when we as a country, as a world celebrate Christmas. It's about gift exchanges, all types of them. You have your list where you give and receive things from other people. You'll do things for other people at Christmas that you probably don't do any other time of the year. There is just something about Christmas where you end up being motivated or drawn to help other people. It's about those fun TV shows that all have the same ending. Something different, special, and unique happen in the movies and shows we like to watch at Christmas and being reminded about giving gifts. It's about hopefully getting the gift you want and giving the gift that they want but it's a unique, special time. There is a lot of anticipation at Christmas.

We sing Joy to the World and we speak of peace on earth. Unfortunately as we do that we think as long as you know that Jesus is the reason for the season then you're okay. That's just not true or accurate. We get this idea that it's peace and joy to everyone. No, the Christmas story is not about peace and joy for everyone. We get that idea from Scripture where we tend to chop it up and leave parts out and we focus on the part that sounds the best to us. We go to Scripture and we pull out one little phrase. I would be surprised if you did not get a Christmas card that said "Peace on Earth." I would be equally surprised if you got a Christmas card that said "Peace on Earth to those whom He is pleased." You would probably get the first part on the card but not the second part on the card.

Peace on earth comes from Scripture. It's what the angel said. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men." One Bible says "Peace and good will to men." I don't like that. It says "peace on whom God's favor rests" which is what the NIV says. The ESV says "to those to whom He is pleased." Peace on whom God's favor rests – God's favor, His grace. Peace to everyone? No, it is peace on whom God's grace is placed, on whom God's favor rests. We tend to leave off those last few words. When you leave off those last few words you can be somewhat of a Universalist. When you leave off those last few words it really does change the statement and it can change the way you think as well.

At Christmas, peace on earth to everyone – that's just not true or accurate. There is no real peace apart from Jesus Christ. There is no true peace apart from being at peace with God. Our mentality tends to be 'I hope everybody gets peace.' That's a noble thought and I think that comes from a love that God gives us for other people but I want to be careful and not cross the line and say I feel like all people are entitled to peace but they're not. I feel like all people should at least have a chance at peace. That's not true either. It might be our desire and what we want but it's not what Scripture tells us.

When He says "Peace on whom God's favor rests" how can we qualify that? There are several times in Scripture where He gives us insight to this. The predominate example of having peace with God where His favor rested on

certain ones and not on others is of course the flood. At the time of the flood when God decided to judge the world, He decided to rest His favor on certain people. How many people did God's favor rest on at the time of the flood? Of all the people on the face of the earth, it was eight. If it had been that year 'peace on earth for whom God's favor rests' then only eight got it out of all the people in the world during that time.

When God choose to give His favor after the flood when mankind begins to replenish the earth and multiply, of all the nations of the earth He chooses one nation which was referred to as the 'least of them.' When He sends them out and they go there is another picture or example of judgment as they defeat a mighty city, Jericho. In Jericho judgment comes and the walls come tumbling down and on whom did God's favor rest? It was only those who were in Rahab's house – her family and those gathered together in that one house in the entire city. When God poured out His judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah how many on whom God's favor rested? It was three. You might be thinking "well that's the Old Testament."

It gets a lot better in the New Testament, doesn't it? You don't see a picture of judgment in the New Testament exactly the way you do in the Old Testament so what's the illustration we get from the New Testament? When God is describing judgment in the New Testament He refers to those who will be saved as a remnant. Romans 11:5 says [5] So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. A remnant is a small portion not a majority, just a remnant that represents the rest. When God describes the Gospel being applied to man in the New Testament and He is searching for an analogy for us to understand of what will take place He says in Matthew 7:13-14 says [13] "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [14] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. There will be many who won't go be with the Lord. Many who won't experience peace with the Lord. Few will find it. Few are those upon whom God's favor rests.

Let me give you an illustration of this. If your first name begins with an "H" or an "L" or an "S" please stand. Let's say all at this service represent mankind. I would say that the people standing are but a remnant of the rest of you. The people standing are those that are saved by grace and I'm no dummy because I made sure my pastor and my wife were standing up. That's the joy of getting to choose the letter. That is just a remnant. It is a small portion of all mankind. When He says on whom God's favor rests it is just a small portion of mankind that would be saved.

God's economy, His measuring stick, is not an American scoreboard. We think that way where the most points win, right? If God is to defeat Satan then more people will be saved than are not, right? That's the way it should work. That's an American mentality of an American scoreboard and we tend to impose that on

God. Scripture doesn't tell us that but that's the way we tend to think. We think most will be saved. There will be some really bad people who won't be saved but most will. No, that is not what Scripture teaches us. He teaches us that He is choosing a remnant of all mankind, none of which are deserving of salvation but that remnant will represent every single language, people group and nation. There will be a remnant chosen from each one and then that together will make a remnant, the trophies of God's grace put before us.

The true story of Christmas is a harsh story, a difficult story, a challenging story. Christ came at Christmas but when He came He was going to be hated, misunderstood, accused, betrayed, beaten and crucified. Worst of all He was going to become sin for you. He was going to take on your sin so that you might have a relationship with God and that's not a peaceful story.

When Jesus was born the king of the day, King Herod, was not at peace. There was not peace on earth for King Herod. King Herod was scared to death of an infant child because it had been prophesied and Herod believed what had been prophesied that, that infant child would become King. In his fear, King Herod decided then that he would have killed all of the infant boys two years of age and younger. Why? It was because of the scorched earth policy. He was going to make sure he got rid of this child King.

One of the first real Christmas celebrations which wouldn't have been called that, would not have been a celebration at all. There would have been mourning and weeping that would be too terrible to hear. Mothers, fathers, grandparents, sisters and brothers whose child was killed from the fear King Herod had. There is no peace in those families. In that situation there was not peace to all mankind. The Christmas story is a harsh story.

As the people began to multiply what is this Christmas story all about? How does this peace on earth get played out? Jesus came as the Prince of Peace which we read about in Isaiah. Peace on earth comes when Jesus comes to earth. Peace on earth can only be found in Jesus so Jesus had to come to earth or there is no true peace on earth. He has to come to earth and somehow along the way we have to understand, put our faith, trust and salvation in this peace that He brings to us. We can't go on believing that we're entitled to God's favor or that there is an easy salvation or an easy peace in life. Do we really think that God would judge all of mankind as an example and a warning? Why did all those people have to die back when He brought the flood? It was to accomplish His purposes as an example for us, for the coming judgment that was before us. It was God's good will to do that, to describe and define to all the people that would live after that to understand that there is a true judgment that is coming.

Here is an example for us. Salvation is costly. It's not free. It's not easy. Peace with God is rare. It's for the remnant. It's not for the majority and it cannot be earned. It can only be received. It is to be treasured more than life itself. Amazing

grace that would save a wretch like me so my question for you is do you have peace? It's not do you feel happy or content with your life or you feel good about being in church. You probably do but do you truly have the peace of God? It is not a feeling of peace. I have found there are many people on this earth who are at peace with themselves, their life but they're not at peace with God. The question is, are you at peace with God? Do you have the peace of God? Are you at peace with God? In other words, has your sin been reconciled? Only when our sin is reconciled before God are we truly at peace with God.

As we come to the Table, we must come at peace with Him. He says this Table is not for those who are not at peace with Him. We must come as those who are at peace with Him, those who have truly surrendered their life. If you have surrendered your life and are at peace with Him then you come in amazement of your salvation. In a sense you should come with survivor's guilt. A tragedy is happening and we deserve the tragedy. We ushered sin into this world and the majority of mankind is going to spend eternity apart from God. Yet for some reason, that only God knows, He decided if you're at peace with Him, to pour out His favor upon you. Pastor Reeder has told us on many occasions that when tragedy occurs it is not for us to ask why did this happen to them but it's for us to ask why didn't it happen to me.

Let me flip that when it comes to salvation. It's not for us to ask why didn't God choose them but it's for us to ask why did God choose me. So in a sense as we come to His Table to have communion with Him, we come with grateful hearts, for no reason that we can possibly understand except for His good pleasure and glory, He has chosen to pour out His favor you, the few, the remnant of all of mankind. So we come with grateful hearts and worshipping Him. We come thanking Him for the body and blood of our Savior.

If you're not at peace with God, you should know you don't get peace by doing good for others or even coming to church at 11pm on Christmas Eve. You get peace by the grace of God. You get peace by faith in Him. It would be my desire that all of us would be at peace with God but I would not be shocked to have a gathering like this and there would be those who might think they have peace, might be satisfied with their life, might be satisfied with where they have put Jesus in their life but He's not their Lord. He isn't your Lord when you have never surrendered your heart and soul to Him, trusting in Him alone for your salvation. So if you don't have peace with God I invite you to have peace with God. We desire that you would have peace with God. We desire that your sins would be reconciled and that you would have peace with God.

Anyone here at Briarwood would love to pray with you and share with you what Christ has done in our hearts. He may be using this time right now to draw you unto Himself that you might be at peace with Him. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests and by His grace may His favor rest on us all. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Most graciously heavenly Father, I can barely think of the words to utter to You, out of gratefulness and thankfulnes that You chose for Your favor for Your grace to rest upon me, to rest upon us. Lord, I am confident that I can come up with reason upon reason why You should certainly choose others than me. Lord, I thank You for Your grace. I thank You for Your Son Jesus Christ and I thank You for allowing us to have eyes opened, ears opened, lives opened and hearts opened that Your Spirit has taught us and revealed to us the true meaning of Christmas which is Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. I pray that each and every one of us are truly at peace You. Our sins have been reconciled and cleansed by the blood of Your Son. Lord, I pray that if there are any reading this that are not at peace with You that You would draw them this day. Give them the faith and trust to depend upon Jesus Christ alone that He might be their Lord and we ask this in His Name, Amen.

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