

Peace on Earth

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Date: 25 December 2019

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Well, Merry Christmas. It's great you could join us this morning and well done for making it through the year. I can't believe how quickly it's gone. You might feel the same way. I thought I'd start though this morning with some Christmas phrases that we hear around the place at this time. So I'll start it and then if you can finish it, okay? We'll start with an easy one first. Mary? Hey, you're all over it. Okay, everyone's awake. All right, here we go. Next one. Ho-ho. Tis the? Peace on? Yeah, I think most of us got them. So that last one there, peace on earth, it's a pretty famous saying, particularly around this time of year and it originated, of course, from those angels we heard about in our first reading from Luke's gospel. So when Jesus was born, remember the angels appeared to the shepherds and praised God saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests. This is where we get the phrase from and it's been used at Christmas time ever since, whether on Christmas cards or in Christmas carols. But what sort of peace were those angels singing about? What sort of peace was Jesus born to bring? Was it a peace of mind? You know how when you go through life's ups and downs or even are facing some difficult circumstances in life at the present and you still have a deep sense of contentment or peace? Is that the kind of peace that Jesus brought to bring? Or is it a peace with others like family? In fact, last year, Hyundai, the car company brought out a car that claimed to give such peace. Take a look at this. Or not?

Throughout history, the backseat has been a battleground. From the great bubblegum incident to the you're on my side conflict between Buckethead and Stupid Face. But the backseat battle is over. Presenting the new Hyundai Santa Fe with new levels of space, comfort and the latest safety technology. New Santa Fe. Peace at last. Now for the record, I have been in a Santa Fe with kids and it was not like that. Perhaps we had the wrong model. I don't know. But sadly, in life, there are so many broken relationships, not just in families, but between neighbours and colleagues and the like.

And so peace with others is something we need too, isn't it? Or was Jesus born to bring peace from war? Perhaps one of the most moving stories in history was the story of what happened on the Western Front during World War I. It was the very first Christmas of the war and remarkably, there was a ceasefire.

The enemies stopped fighting and even came out of the trenches, shook hands, exchanged gifts, and even in one area played a game of soccer in no man's land. This next video is much longer, but it's worth a look. Have a look at this.

Jenkins. No. Jenn Googles. ■ He sings like that.

[4 : 15] This child is stout, O ■ cer Pah. Holy infant so tempting and all.
Sleep in heaviest warm peace. I ■ ■ ■ mm eloquhael am ■ ■ ■ any flavor of ours.
A British come! A British come! Adol!
Jim? Jim! Don't do it! Hold! He's not being wounded! No, Otto!
Jim! My name is Jim.

[5 : 27] My name is Otto. Pleased to meet you, Otto. Freut mich. Rose, she's calm. I'm... She's calm. I'm... She's calm.

She's calm. She's calm. I'm■. Thank you.

Happy Christmas.

Happy Christmas. Happy Christmas.

It's quite moving, isn't it? And we need this kind of peace in our world too, don't we?
Peace from war. But just keep watching for a few seconds more.

[6 : 56] Thank you.

And what's worse, after this Christmas truce in 1914, as you saw, they went back to war. It wasn't a lasting peace, was it? And the sin of human hatred and greed was such that there was never another truce like it for the rest of the world.

There were some other truces on Christmas Day, but nothing like that one. Human sin had dug in so deep and people become so bitter. And there's nothing like it until the war ended five years later.

You see, human sin, whether it's hatred or greed or whatever it is, it ruins our peace of mind. It ruins our peace with others. It ruins peace from war.

But it has also ruined our peace with God. And this is why Jesus came. You see, people often say that they don't believe in God because when they look around the world, there is no lasting peace.

[8 : 24] It seems as though Jesus didn't come to bring peace. But you see, Jesus was born to deal with the underlying issue that ruins all our peace, which is sin.

And to first bring peace with God. And then all the other peace would follow. And this peace with God is what we saw in our second reading from Colossians.

And so you can follow along in your handouts on the bottom of the page or it'll be on the slide. So the first two verses there we read that God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through Jesus to reconcile to God all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

At verse 19 is Christmas. God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus. Jesus is fully God who came to earth to become fully man.

But verse 20 is Easter. Jesus died to make, did you notice, peace. And this peace is with God.

[9 : 40] Because as the next verse says, our behavior has alienated us from God. It says, once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

You see, our evil behavior or what the Bible calls sin has alienated us from God and made us enemies with God. It happens the same with people too.

I mean, imagine for a moment that someone ignores you, continually rejects you and often hurts you. People say they're called neighbors. But you're not going to have peace with them, are you?

Their behavior has alienated them from you, has made them enemies with you. And that's exactly what we've done with God. From time to time, we've all ignored God, rejected his way in our lives.

And certainly we've all hurt God by not treating him as, well, quite frankly, God. And so that sin has alienated us from him, made us enemies with him.

[10 : 48] Which means when we die, we will have to give an account. And we will face just judgment. This is why peace with God is the peace we need most of all.

Because without this peace with God, we are his enemies still. Headed for an eternity of just judgment. But God loves us deeply.

And so in his mercy, he sent his son who went willingly. First to earth at Christmas, then to the cross at Easter. And at the cross, Jesus took all our judgment, our punishment in our place.

So that we instead can be forgiven. Reconciled back to God. Have peace with God. Counted free from accusation.

Free from judgment. Do you see what the next verse says? And number 22. But now he has reconciled you. That is, God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body at the cross.

[11 : 52] Through death, his death. To present you wholly in his sight. Without blemish. And free from accusation. You see, Jesus was born to pay for our sins at the cross so that we can be reconciled back to God.

We can have peace with God. Counted innocent in his sight. Free from accusation. Free from judgment. No longer his enemies, but now part of his family.

And that means we also have the certain hope of heaven with life eternal. Do you see the next bit of the reading? Verse number 23. The last verse there.

Says, if you continue in your faith established and firm and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. The word gospel at the end there just means good news.

The good news of Jesus. And notice it holds out or gives us hope. In the Bible, the word hope is not how we use the word hope today.

[12 : 53] We often use it in a sense of wishful thinking. Like, I hope I don't get more socks and undies for Christmas. Or I hope we don't get another 44 degree like last Friday. Both of which I suspect are not going to come true.

Rather, hope in the Bible is certain and guaranteed. It's the certain hope of heaven. The guaranteed life eternal.

And so, you see, peace with God actually makes an eternity of difference. Freed from judgment for life eternal. This is why peace with God is the peace we need most of all.

And this is the peace Jesus was born to bring. The peace the angels first sung about at their very first Christmas. One of my favorite carols is Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

It was written by a man called Charles Wesley. And he understood that the peace the angels sung about was peace with God. And so, he wrote the first verse. Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

[13 : 58] Glory to the newborn king. Peace on earth and mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled. Peace with God.

This is the peace Jesus was born to bring. The peace we need most of all. First, because it makes an eternity of difference. And second, because it then leads to the other types of peace too.

For example, peace with God means knowing for certain that God is with us to sustain us through life's ups and downs. And even bring us through death to life eternal.

Which gives us peace of mind when we're struggling. I've lost count of the number of people at our church who have gone through difficult times in life. But have found peace of mind because their peace with God meant they knew God was with them to sustain them.

Or a lady I conducted a funeral for a few months ago. When I saw her before she passed away, she said she was at peace despite knowing her death was coming, was imminent.

[15 : 05] You see, she knew she had peace with God, which meant she knew where she was going. And that gave her peace of mind too.

In fact, she nearly passed away earlier this year. And when she didn't die, she told me she was disappointed. Because she knew where she was going. Such was her peace of mind because she had peace with God, you see.

But peace with God also leads to peace with others. I don't know if you realise, but this year marks the 25th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.

If you remember that. Where in just 100 days, the Hutu majority killed more than 800,000 Tutsis at the minority race.

One Hutu who took part in the killings was a man called Kalikste. Kalikste. I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing his name right, but he's on your left and his wife is Marcella. They were Hutus.

[16 : 05] And their neighbours, literally next door neighbours, were Andrew and Madrine. Now, Kalikste and Andrew grew up as friends. But when the genocide broke out, Kalikste took part in the murder of Madrine's whole family.

Her mother and her five siblings. Now, when the genocide finished after that 100 days and there was trials and so on, Kalikste went to jail, went to prison. And there he confessed.

He repented. So you can see in the yellow underline there, he spent a lot of time in grief and repented of his sins to God and his friends. But when he got out, Andrew's hatred of him continued until one day they all went to church and heard of God's forgiveness that brought them peace with God.

And that united them together as one family and that moved them, or moved Andrew to forgive Kalikste. And now, they're close friends.

Andrew is the one on your left and Kalikste is the one on your right. In fact, they can even hold hands as brothers.

[17 : 21] See, peace with God leads to peace with others. It's why at church we have so many people from so many different backgrounds who wouldn't normally, quite frankly, give two hoots about each other, but who do care and love one another.

Because our common peace with God has united us together and given us peace with each other. And one day, peace with God will also lead to peace from war.

For Jesus will return a second time to establish a new creation where there will be complete peace from war. Where the truths of 1914 and that feeling of joy that we felt in that video before we realized it was an advert, that joy will be nothing compared to what we'll feel then.

And the only reason Jesus is waiting to bring this type of peace from war to is to give people more time to trust in him. For this is the only way to have peace with God and life eternal.

Do you remember how the passage ends in verse number 23? Notice the first word there. If, if you continue in your faith, established and firm and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

[18 : 48] In other words, it's by having faith in Jesus, believing in him, trusting in him, that we have peace with God and life eternal. And so can I ask you this morning, do you have faith in Jesus?

Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe in him, that he was born to die for you, that you may have peace with God now? For it's only by believing in Jesus that we can have that with life eternal.

And for us who do, then this Christmas, firstly, continue in that faith, as the verse says, not move from the hope held out in the good news of Jesus.

Yes, enjoy food, friends, family, presents, holidays. They're great things to enjoy, and I'm going to enjoy some of them too. But let's not let those great trappings of Christmas move us from what matters most, Jesus.

And secondly, this Christmas, live out our peace with God and enjoy the peace of mind and with others it brings. You see, it's all too easy to forget that our peace with God means God is with us to sustain us.

[20 : 05] And so in times of tough, instead of praying and trusting and finding peace of mind, we keep stressing and worrying and find anxiety instead, don't we?

And it's all too easy to forget that our peace with God means we have peace with one another as his family. And so instead of apologizing or forgiving and enjoying our peace with one another, we sometimes hold on to grudges and refuse to apologize or forgive.

And instead of enjoying peace, we endure bitterness. And so this Christmas, let's live out our peace with God and enjoy the peace of mind and the peace with others it brings.

And finally, this Christmas, give thanks for our peace with God that Jesus was born to bring. It not only leads to all those other types of peace, but it makes an eternity of difference, doesn't it?

Remember, freed from just judgment for life eternal. And so as you sit down to your turkey lunches today, or in my case, lamb roast, way better than turkey in my opinion, but anyway, why not give thanks for the food, for the cook?

[21 : 23] Don't forget to thank the cook. For the food, family and friends and presents, but most of all, for the peace we have with God. The peace that Jesus was born to bring.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you so much for Christmas, where we remember the birth of the Lord Jesus.

We thank you so much that he was born to bring us peace with you, which makes an eternity of difference for us and leads to peace of mind and with others now, with a certain hope of peace from war later.

Help us, father, to live in light of this peace we have. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.