

How God Achieves Peace on Earth

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Date: 22 December 2019

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[0 : 00] So there are two readings this morning. The first is taken from John 14, which you've actually heard this morning already. And then the second one is from Luke 2. So John 14 to begin.

So John chapter 14, verse 27. Now hear God's word. I just said it. The Lord Jesus Christ is speaking to his disciples.

He is telling them that he is about to depart and go to be with the Father, but he will send the Comforter. That is God, the Holy Spirit. And verse 27 is this.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid.

And then in Luke 2, verse 14. And Luke 2, verse 14, in the context of John, is God's, how God achieves peace on earth.

[1 : 33] Which says, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased.

Well, we ask God to bless the reading of his word. We ask God to bless the reading of his word into our lives and hearts so that we would live by it, live according to it.

And we'll come back to that in message form after this next hymn. Thank you. Thank you. Well, as you know, over the previous weeks, each Sunday of Advent, we have looked at a different aspect of what it means for God.

God to come into the world. On the first Sunday of Advent, we looked at hope. Not hoping in hope, but a hope must be founded in someone who can make those hopes come true.

This is important because as we hope, who are you hoping in for what you're hoping for is the most important question to ask. Who are you hoping in for what you're hoping for?

[3 : 05] Nothing ever comes out of thin air. It has to be given. And so who are you hoping in for what you're hoping for? As we moved on to the love of God, we recognized in the second Sunday of Advent that God's love is effectual.

That means that God's love provides all the qualities and all the power in order to make us love him back. Human love cannot do that.

When you love a person, that love cannot make them love you back. It's up to them. It's their choice whether or not they reciprocate that love. But God's love is effectual, meaning that when God, we love God because he first loved us.

His love affects that response in us. And then we came to joy. And joy, like the others, must have a direct object. It's no good saying I'm in love because you would want me to finish the sentence and tell you what I'm in love with or who I'm in love with.

Joy must have a direct object. What are you joyful about? What is your joy in? And this morning we come to peace.

[4 : 20] And peace has to be understood at least in two ways. That is peace with God and peace from God. We're not to live under the assumption that most people in this world have either.

We as the church are the only people on earth who recognize that we get peace from God and that we have peace with God. So we get peace from God and we have peace with God as a result.

But the world out there does not live under the peace of God, Romans 1. They actually live under God's judgment. But God in his patience extends the gospel out to every man, woman, boy and girl, extending his patience in order that they come to receive peace.

In 2 Corinthians 5 we learn that God makes peace and then tells you to step into that peace, to receive that peace in Christ Jesus.

And what Jesus says here is that the peace that he gives is not like the kind of peace that the world gives. And we've seen that with all of these qualities. God's hope is not the same kind as worldly

hope.

[5 : 34] God's love is clearly not the same kind as worldly love. The joy that God gives cannot be compared with earthly joy because earthly joy is nothing in comparison to what God's joy is.

And the same is true here with peace. But many of us are going to be sat here thinking, well, God's peace is a feeling. God's peace is something that I experience.

Well, it is, but only secondary. In other words, where does the peaceful feeling come from? How do I know that I have peace with God when I don't feel that I'm at peace with God?

How do you know that you have the peace of God when you don't feel all that peaceful? So it would be fine to say that peace is a feeling, but it's a bit of a poor explanation to say, well, I feel peaceful, therefore I must be.

People are always peaceful when they're doing their own thing. Even Christians who do the very opposite of what God does, when they're doing what they want to do, they're at peace. So being at peace is no indication of God's favor in that sense.

[6 : 45] You need more explanation. My favorite illustration of that is that Jonah was with his head asleep on a pillow going in the opposite direction of what God wanted him to go in, completely at peace.

His conscience, he was fast asleep, doing the very opposite of what God called him to do. So the idea of that kind of peace being an indication of God's favor, it's not even close to getting true to what we mean by genuine peace.

So what does peace mean? How do we need to flesh this out? Well, number one, you can have peace at an individual level, which is true. But more importantly, the peace that God gives is going to be a world peace.

Okay? And this isn't said, this isn't given to women who've got barely nothing on with a ribbon around them saying, I want world peace. It doesn't come that way.

And we shouldn't look to those type of people to think, isn't that nice? That's not how peace happens. The world cannot give peace. It cannot achieve peace.

[7 : 56] And we cannot look to anything in the world to achieve it because the things in the world are part of the problem. I've often said that, you know, with the recent political upheaval that we've had and all the voting and which I'm always fond of saying, I'm sorry, you're welcome, which is another way of saying, I'm glad they didn't get in, but I'm sorry, this one did.

Because you can't really go, well, this is the solution. This is the solution to peace on earth. No, they're part of the problem. If they're unredeemed, politicians are part of the problem for a lack of peace.

Okay? If they're unredeemed. Only the redeemed and only God can actually achieve peace. So we don't look anywhere else for it. Now, the temptation is, of course, that people in the world achieve peace by smoothing things over.

Husbands try to do this with their wives after they've had an argument if they're not used to asking for forgiveness. And wives try to do this if they don't want to admit that they're actually wrong.

Let's just smooth things over. Well, that's not peace either. Okay? That's how most people get by. But that's not lasting peace. It's just a smoothing over, perhaps, especially at this time of year.

[9 : 16] Well, let's talk about it after we've got through this or after we've got through that. So it's tempting to smooth things over because it makes life easier, right?

Nobody wants to grab the thorns. Nobody wants to grab the nettle because it hurts. But some things need to be removed in order for there to be real calm, real peace.

And this is what God does. He sends Christ down into the world to grab the nettle, to deal with the issues that actually cause a lack of peace. And the response of people is to be glory to God in the highest.

Glory to God in the highest. And then God says, peace to all men on earth, to all people on earth. So the formula for peace on earth is giving glory to God.

Giving glory to God. And it's a fairly easy one to work out if you think about it in this way. That if everyone in the world loves God, okay, and everyone's at peace with God, they're at peace with each other.

[10 : 25] But if people aren't at peace with God, then it follows that they're not going to be at peace with each other. At least not on any true or lasting or any meaningful way. And so the peace of God here is not so much an experience as much as it is the rule of God.

God rules the world. And some people are a bit slow in understanding that. And God must rule in your heart for you to experience that internal peace.

And for you to experience peace in the home, he has to rule over everything. This means that when it actually comes down to who gets their way in the home, the answer is pretty straightforward.

God gets his way. Okay. My responsibility is to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow Jesus. Because that's what it means to experience peace.

The rule of God is where we recognize what true peace is. Anything else is a smoothing over.

Okay. I'm fond of saying, and though people seem to get quite confused when I said, that I'm not all that fond of saying you need to say sorry.

[11 : 34] Because sorry puts the wrong person in the driving seat. Sorry is someone trying to smooth something over to get on with. Now, if it's an accident, if you spill the milk or you break a vase, okay, sorry is more than fine.

Because that's an accident. It's not a sin. It's not a sin to spill milk. It's not a sin to break the vase.

And so if you walk into the room and you knock something off the mantelpiece, if you have one.

And it's, you know, it's your great grandmother's prized china piece that your mother has on her thing and you knock it off. That's not a sin.

It's an accident. It's something that you ought to say sorry for. But it's not a sin. But when there's sin in the home and undoubt with sin, sorry doesn't get rid of it.

Sorry smooths over the cracks only for those cracks to reappear deeper later on. Asking for forgiveness is put the other burden on the other person now where they must receive forgiveness.

[12 : 37] So, you know, we teach in our family, you know, if it's a sin, you ask for forgiveness. If it's an accident, you say sorry. And so when it comes to God, this, we're dealing with sin.

We're not dealing with accidents. And so the response is, will you forgive me? I have sinned against you. Will you forgive me? That's the road to peace. God makes peace possible by Christ dying on the cross for men, women, boys and girls.

He's making that peace and now he's saying, receive it. And the way that you receive it is you acknowledge that you broke the peace. It was you who caused the argument in the first place.

It was you who split up from God in the first place. Okay? And it's that admittance. Of course, it goes a long way back. And that's what we're getting to, to real peace.

Because the temptation is always, even amongst Christians, to smooth things over. Nobody wants to grab the nettle. Nobody wants to do that initiating difficulty of dealing with the real issues.

[13 : 47] So peace is from God and peace is with God. God gives peace and you have peace with God by receiving it. And the way you receive peace with God is by receiving Christ Jesus.

If you want peace, then you need Jesus. If you want peace with God, you must repent and believe in Jesus and come to him.

And I've often said, you know, especially at this time of year, that Christmas is sort of a combination of a few things. Presents, food and arguments. Okay?

Presents, food and arguments. Presents. I grew up in a home with six younger brothers and a mum. And we had the food. We had the presents. And then somewhere along, perhaps tiredness kicked in.

It didn't matter. But an argument would break out. Okay? He's playing with my toy. You, right? And suddenly, how can a good day be turned into a day that just goes horribly wrong?

[14 : 49] And so there can be a lack of peace for a number of different reasons. And we must know how to deal with it. And so calm tempers, the absence of alcohol or the absence of other things, is not the presence of peace.

Okay? We're not to think that the absence of disruption is the presence of peace. It's just the absence of disruption. We're not to think that the absence of trouble and difficulty is the presence of peace.

It isn't. It's just the absence of disruption. The presence of peace is something entirely different. It must be given and it must be received.

And so how do you receive it? Because it's not as straightforward as it might seem. And this is the way you receive it. In Christ Jesus. Where everybody loves God.

Everybody recognizes that the rule of God is the solution to peace. That I, as a husband, live under the rule of God. My wife lives under the rule of God.

[15 : 54] My children live under the rule of God. We all follow him. And we receive our marching orders from God. And therefore, we all march to the same beat.

Now, why does it... Okay, that sounds great. But why doesn't it actually work? Well, it doesn't work because of sin. Sin is when you don't want to march to the same beat.

You don't want to keep in step with everybody else. You want to do your own thing. And that, of course, leads to disruption. That, of course, leads to the breaking of peace.

Now, is there another way of explaining this? Yeah. Aristotle, back in the day, was a Greek philosopher. And before him, God got to it. But he spoke of this idea called the transcendent third to explain how relationships work.

And it's probably my favorite illustration because he explains it so well. He says that when two people together fall in love with the same thing, that it's beyond them as an individual and greater than them as individuals.

[17 : 00] They'll end up in a relationship that'll last. They can't help but end up into a relationship with last for a number of different reasons. If you have two people who are thinking about getting married and they think that the only thing that matters is I love him and he loves me, that that there is the foundation for a lasting relationship, it isn't.

It's not even close. It's not a foundation at all. And it's not even close to being the real means of achieving peace and a lasting relationship.

Why is Jesus the answer to peace on earth is the question. Why is Jesus the answer to peace on earth? If nothing else is, there is no peace before Jesus comes.

Why are we reading here glory to God in the highest and peace on earth? And the context is, of course, Jesus has come. Why is Jesus the answer to peace in your family?

Why is Jesus the answer to peace in the workplace? Why is Jesus the only answer when he seems to be the cause of much disruption?

[18 : 10] You know, I've got brothers who, you know, don't mind inviting me around to his house, but he gives me strict orders not to speak about Jesus. Okay.

And so what are you meant to do? Well, you can either not go or you say, well, I'm going to come, but I'm not going to deny who I am.

Okay. I can, I can turn down the evangelism if you want, but I'm not, I'm not going to deny Christ.

I'm not going to keep quiet about Christ to keep your kind of peace because that's no kind of peace at all.

I'm not going to believe that your kind of peace is the right kind of peace. We're not going to do that.

And so you begin to realize immediately that Jesus is this so-called solution to peace on earth.

And yet in family environments, he seems to be the, he seems to do the absolute opposite to bring peace. Well, let me just cut it short if I can this morning before we move on.

[19 : 13] The only way Jesus is peace on earth is you've got to understand is that isn't including the reconciliation of everything. Okay. It's peace to all men whom God is well pleased with whom he is pleased.

Okay. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased. That's where the peace is found, which means that in this current life, in this current world, we're not going to have world peace, but there'll come a day where we will.

There will come that day. So how do we get there? Well, it says here, glory to God in the highest. God gives peace when people glorify him.

It is the formula of peace. Peace. You recognize that in any kind of relationship that if two people agree on the same thing, there's peace. But if two people disagree over what they're supposed to agree about, there's not peace.

And so when two people in a relationship give glory and recognize a third thing as better, higher, and something that they ought to live their lives by, then suddenly there's agreement.

[20 : 23] Suddenly there is peace. Peace. I can put it a slightly different way as Jesus comes into the world. Perhaps you've wandered into a room where there's been a table and you're not quite sure where to sit.

You know, no one's actually put out name tags of where you're to sit at the table. And you wander in and you're just a little bit, so you just sit wherever you sit.

And you're at the right table, okay, but you could be in the wrong chair. You're at the right table.

You're meant to be sitting at the table enjoying fellowship and peace and friendship and the food.

But you could be sat in the wrong chair. And so what happens at Christmas, at Emmanuel of God being with us, is God inviting us to the table of fellowship?

Is God inviting us into this relationship of God bringing us in where we can enjoy everything that God has? But when he comes, he says, you're sat in my chair.

[21 : 21] And we don't like to be told to move. We don't like to be told to move out the way. And what happens, if I can illustrate it, is you have taken the position in your life that there is no God.

I can sit here because there is no God. But when God comes into the world, he says, that's my seat. You have to move. So you're at the right table, but you're in the wrong chair.

And that's most people's response to Christ coming into the world. That they take a position that isn't actually theirs. They're invited at the table.

They're invited to enjoy all the blessings that God gives. But they have to be in the right position. And the right position, place, is not God's place. God has his own place.

And you have yours. And so when two people are sat at the right end of the table, they're sat in the right seats. Then there's peace. Then there's harmony. We're not to take the position of God.

[22 : 24] But that does happen. So when God comes into this world, it's all about moving us from where we are to where we ought to be. He's moving us into a position where we can have peace with him.

He sits at the head and we sit around him. He wants us to enjoy everything that he has given to us in Christ Jesus. But he is telling us that we can only enjoy it in one location.

And that is by belonging to Jesus. I've used the illustration of sitting in the right chair. But that's just another way of saying you get to enjoy the table and everything that's on it by belonging to Jesus.

God moves us into the position of coming to see that Jesus is how we receive peace. And as you live under the rule of Jesus is how you experience peace in the home.

And I want to focus on the home because this time of year it can be the place of much disruption. The pressures, money pressures, food pressures, family pressures.

[23 : 31] Suddenly peace just seems to be very, very, very difficult to achieve. Incredibly difficult to achieve. But if everyone in the homes recognizes that Jesus is Lord, then everybody's accountable in the same way.

The father doesn't have any right above his children. He has the right to tell his children where to sit and what to do because he's a father. But he doesn't have any right to do things that only God has the right to do.

Same with the mother, same with the children. We enjoy peace because we live under the rule of Jesus. And so the only other type of peace that you can have, which is not a real peace, is when you send people off into their own rooms or they just go off into their own rooms to get out of the disruption in the other one.

Okay? When people do what they want to do, they always have peace with themselves. But that's not real peace. So we come back to this idea that it takes three to receive peace.

This is what I mean. When you recognize in the second part of this verse, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased, we recognize that peace is something that is given from God to us.

[24 : 50] It is something that is individually true. It is something that can be true in a family. And it will be something that will be true in the whole world eventually. And God gets there by removing the things that cause unpeace, that cause disruption and trouble.

Those who do not give glory to God are disruptors. They are agitators. They are the cause of the continual disruption. They are sad at the table, but they do not want to sit in that seat.

They do not want to sit in that seat. I can remember a long time ago, sat around a dinner table, and one child decided to stand on the seat. And the response was, can you please sit down?

And standing on the seat, can you please sit down? And this went on for some time, and then suddenly we got there. Dinner was cold by the time we got there, but we got there.

Only for the child to say, I may be sat down on the outside, but inside I'm standing up. That internal rebellion of, well, okay, I'm going to do what you say, but on the inside, I'm...

[26 : 09] That's not peace. There has to be an absolute heart change. Where you want to, on the inside, be sat in the right chair, and you want to be sat there.

Okay, peace is never maintained or achieved by forcing people into a position where they don't want to be. There has to be a real, definite heart change.

I've wrote about this recently on the necessity of true understanding of conversion. There has to be a definite, converted heart. A heart that is bent, molded, and shaped by God to take into consideration.

So we look for peace, but peace begins internally, not externally. It doesn't begin by constraining or shaping. It begins in the heart.

So we come back to the transcendent third. How does it work? Well, when we look for any kind of relationships to work, everybody has to agree to the same convictions.

[27 : 15] Everybody has to agree to the same commitments. Aristotle said, as I've said before, the transcendent third is when two people love the same thing and agree that the thing that they love is greater than themselves as individuals.

Imagine it like this. Two friends who love their country. Two friends who love goodness. Two friends who love the same thing. That as they love the same thing, they find that their relationship with each other is improved.

You know, when two people love the same thing, that triangular relationship with God. If a man and a wife both love God in the same way, the closer they are to God, the closer they are to each other. I mean, I don't want to give you a marriage prep here or after marriage, but the classic illustration of explaining to young people when they're getting married, it's always better to do marriage prep after they're married because nobody gets it before you're married.

After you've been married a year, now let's sit down and talk through what it means to be married because for the first year, you're still living like you're single. Who's this person sharing my food?

[28 : 24] You know, all of these things need to be addressed. But the classic illustration is, of course, that in a marriage you have God at the top of the triangle and you would either corner. All triangles have three sides.

At least they have done up to now. We just pray that that will continue. But I went to school, believe it or not, when boys were boys and girls were girls, but that's changing.

So who knows? We pray that it doesn't change. So the triangle works that as these two people are closer to God, as the triangle comes in, they're automatically closer to each other.

That's how peace works. When they both love the thing that is greater than them and different from each other, they are brought closer together. That's the way all relationships work.

But you remove God, then you've got one person going off in their own direction. It doesn't work. There is no peace. There is no reconciliation of any kind. You know, so if two people are getting married and they say, oh, it's going to work because I love him.

[29 : 26] Well, that's no indication that it's going to work. I don't want to burst your bubble if you're thinking of getting married. And the same the other way. It takes God to give that foundation of peace and a lasting relationship.

So God creates peace between us and him in Jesus and between each other in Jesus. It takes Jesus to bring us all together. It takes Jesus to bring us all together.

Because without Christ giving us his love that causes us to love him back, all we are left with is a human love. And human love cannot create in the other person the desire to love you back.

It cannot do that. We need the power of God, the affecting love of God that loves us in such a way that causes us to love him back.

Human love cannot do that. I can love my wife with a human love. But for me to have any confidence that she will love me back, I need to know that she loves God first.

[30 : 37] That's the only way I know that she can love me back. Because I know that my love can't create a love in return. Now, people say, well, of course it can. No, you're just bought into what the world is teaching.

And it ain't true. True love has to be effectual. Okay? Because it's easy for people to fall out of love. All right?

It's easy for people to swap one person for another person. That happens. And so true love, this affecting love, is only something that can come from God.

And so this is what we need. We need God to love us, and we need to love God back, and that automatically creates a love for other people that belong to God.

So if I can't control what somebody else loves, then what do I do? I need to show them Jesus. If I want peace on earth, if I want peace in my family, Jesus may not seem like the automatic answer, right?

[31 : 42] Because he's the cause of much argument. But Jesus is the only answer. Jesus is the only answer to peace. He's the only way forward to a lasting peace.

So here's the exhortation. Receiving peace means receiving Jesus. Receiving peace means receiving Jesus. And that peace is not limited.

It is experienced as an individual, but it goes out into the whole world. It may seem as though it's limited for the moment because we don't have peace in the world, but this is to be short-sighted of what God is actually doing in the world.

We're only thinking about today, maybe tomorrow or next year. But God has thought about 5,000 years' time, 6,000 years' time. What would the world look like then?

We are not to judge what the world looks like in 5,000 years' time by looking at what it looks like today. The world today does not look like it did 4,000 years ago.

[32 : 45] It looks very, very different. And so what is the world going to look like in 4,000 years' time? Well, it's not going to look like this. And God's plan is for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Now that seems like a positive move forward. That doesn't look like we lose. It looks like we win. It looks like God wins, that his peace is proven to be true and effectual in the world.

So the call is simple. God has made peace and God is extending that peace through Christ. God has made peace through giving his son into the world, grabbing the nettle, dying on the cross.

And we have to admit, we broke the relationship up in the first place. And as we repent and as we come to him, we then enter into the peace that God gives.

So here's the final thought. The temptation at Christmas when you're around with family members and brothers and sisters and those who don't really know Christ is to run into the difficulty of trying to achieve a peace by not speaking about Jesus.

[34 : 00] Right? We're all together. Don't bring certain things up. But I'm more concerned here not about creating arguments at Christmas, but about getting you to understand that I can understand willful tactfulness and wisdom is always needed.

And it's best not to cause an argument in order to get the gospel across because it defeats the whole point. But the temptation is when talking about the things of Christ is to stop talking about the things of Christ when it gets difficult and to smooth things over.

We do need wisdom. We do need love to be the motivator. But smoothing things over is a bit like you trying to get that ripple at your rug. You shake it out the end from where you are, but you notice down the other end it's just bigger.

Okay? When you smooth things over in any format within a marriage relationship, within a family relationship, within any kind of relationship, smoothing over is simply the equivalent of shaking the ripple out the rug your end only to leave a bigger ripple at the other end.

At some point we all have to face it. And it's only Christ who gets rid of it all together. This is why it says glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased.

[35 : 23] God is pleased with those who come to Christ. So if you really want peace, if you really desire peace, then it may be wise not to just say anything just yet, but to pray.

If you want that person to be at peace with you, if you want a peaceful marriage, if you want a peaceful family, if you want peace to be on earth, what you're actually praying for is for people to come to Jesus.

If you really want peace, what you're really asking for is people to come to Jesus. And God has given us Jesus so that people would do that. Amen.