

God's Formula for Peace

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] This morning is easy to find and short to read. It's in Luke chapter 2 and verse 14. Luke chapter 2 and verse 14.

Okay, now hear God's word. Luke 2, beginning at verse 14.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased. I'll read it again before we sing and then come back to it as a message.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased. Amen. So if you'd like to open your Bibles again to Luke chapter 2, beginning at verse 14.

As you're doing that, let me just say that over the next few Sundays, I would like us to see Emmanuel. Emmanuel means God with us, and I want us to not only recognize that God is with us in the sense that Jesus was born into this world, but let's agree that we all know that to be true, and I want us to focus on what it means for us to recognize that God is with us right now, which is something quite different than his birth.

[1 : 48] So over previous years, when we've got towards Christmas and we're preaching sermons through Advent, I focused on the period surrounding the birth of Jesus.

What I'd like to do over the next few weeks is to focus on Emmanuel, the reality of God being with us. And to do that, we start here in Luke 2, verse 14.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is well pleased. In summary, God has a formula to bring about peace on the earth.

It is a perfect formula, but it's one that must be listened to quite carefully. Now, as we enter this period of time where, as I said, we focus on not just the birth of Jesus, not just the coming of Jesus, but on the reality that God is with us, what does it mean for God to be with us right at this moment?

And what does it mean for God to be with us at this moment when the promise is peace? Jesus doesn't look as though he's the sort of maker of peace when Jesus seems to be the cause of much division.

[3 : 08] I don't know about you, but at Christmas time, it's quite common. It's not so common for us now being nowhere near family. But to get the family around, and of course, within families, there are some who believe and some who don't.

And here you are giving grace for your meal, and Jesus is the center of your dinner, as it were. But he's not the center for everyone. So while Jesus is the source of peace for you, how can he be the source of peace for them, when for them he's the source of division, because they can't sit happily at a table fellowship?

Well, that's a serious question. It's a question that needs answering. And so it's quite a bold statement to say that Jesus is God's formula for peace on the earth.

It's quite a bold statement. Now, here's what I want you to do, and here's what I don't want you to do. I don't want you to accept that as a truth, as though, yeah, I believe it, and not know why.

And there's a couple of reasons why I don't want you to do that. The first is because God wants you to know why Jesus is the source of peace on earth.

[4 : 18] God actually wants you to know why Jesus is God's formula for peace on earth. He, you know, he's telling you because he wants you to know. And so just to accept it, you know, yeah, okay, you know, thank you, God, and to move on is to sort of, you know, that's great, you know, I'm interested in something else.

I think that God deserves the respect to actually not only to accept that as truth, but to listen to why it is true.

The other reason is more practical, and that is you're going to be with people over the Christmas period, no doubt, who are not going to believe that Jesus is the source of peace. And if you've just accepted it, but you don't know why he is, you're not going to be able to explain to them why he is.

So they've got their argument clear. They know why Jesus isn't the source of peace. And if you've just accepted that he is, where's your counter-argument?

Where are you ready to give an answer for everyone who's like that? Well, you see the problem. Christians need to be able to give an answer to those who say opposite things about Jesus.

[5 : 36] And so it is an issue of being able to give an answer. And if your answer is just, then, well, you've got to have faith, that's great. I mean, I think that's a good answer, but I don't think it's good enough.

Because they'll turn back to you and say, well, have faith in what? And then you're back to the beginning, having to explain yourself all over again. Or, you know, it just becomes a circular argument. You need to be able to spell it out, why Jesus is God's formula for peace on earth.

So what I'm going to do this morning is do it for you. And then you can perhaps remember it so as to explain it to others. I hope this is going to be a benefit to you as well.

But it's also going to be a benefit to others who want to argue the fact. Now, over my sabbatical period, I've been doing a lot of reading, as you might imagine.

One of the men that I've been reading is a guy called Aristotle. Aristotle was a Greek philosopher back in the day, way back in the day, a long, long time ago. And he had a very good understanding, a very clear insight on how relationship works.

[6 : 45] And he spoke of this idea called the transcendent third. That the only way any relationship can work, and let's just make it super simple between two people.

That the only way that relationship can work is if you have a transcendent third. What did he mean by that? Well, he meant that there had to be something above and beyond the two individuals themselves.

That it wasn't enough for them just to love each other. That wasn't enough to keep the peace. That wasn't enough even to keep people together. There had to be a transcendent third that they could agree on.

And only then would you have what you could call a triangular relationship. You know, this idea of loving the same thing and then being brought together because you love the same thing.

And so what Aristotle said is that when you fall independently in love with the same thing together, that as you both love the same thing, you can't help but start loving each other.

[7 : 48] It's very similar to what Jesus said when he was asked, what is the greatest commandment? So love God and your neighbor. Well, if you can't do the first one, you're not going to be able to do the second one.

So there's this transcendent third that as you love God, you will begin to love your neighbor. So the bond between this way is reinforced and established by the fact that you begin to love a transcendent third.

You both fall in love with someone other than yourself. And that's how you're brought together. That's how you will end up in a relationship that will last.

That's how you'll end up in a relationship that is peaceful, hopefully forever, a lasting relationship. And so God answers how he will bring peace upon the earth by being the transcendent third that comes into this world.

Now we can see quite easily, or we can at least begin to see quite easily, that if everyone on earth, imagine, just imagine for a moment that if everyone on earth loved God, if everyone on earth had that same love, what do you think the relationship would be like towards each other?

[9 : 07] Well, it'd be a lot better than what it is now, wouldn't it? Suddenly you begin to see that because everyone has the same transcendent third, love, that they are naturally brought together.

This isn't like birds of a feather flock together. No, this is something quite different. That as you love something above and beyond yourself, something far greater than you as an individual and far greater than you as a couple, that as you love that, you can't help but be brought together.

And that's what Aristotle's saying, but that of course, that's what the Bible is. Saying. So we can easily see that if everyone loved God in the world, then the world would actually be a peaceful place.

We say, well, it wouldn't be because people are still sinful. Right. But if everyone loves God and keeps his commandments and loves his neighbor, just like if you truly love God, then that's the overflow.

Then you can understand how you're beginning to get to a world full of peace. In other words, when everyone in the world loves God and everyone in the world gives glory to God in the highest, that's heaven.

[10 : 16] And that's the future. So you're not going to be able to see it now. You're only going to be able to see it from the viewpoint, the vantage point of the future that God has promised to you.

That you're going to enter a heaven and a new earth. Don't forget the new earth. New heavens and new earth. In which you will experience this peace on earth with God and with each other.

But it can only be seen from that point. So glory to God in the highest and on earth. Peace among those whom he is well pleased. So what does it mean then to give glory to God in the highest?

What does it actually look like for that to happen? Well, if that needs to happen in order for God to pour out his peace on earth, if that's the formula, give glory to God in the highest, and that is the means of opening the floodgate to peace on earth, what does it mean to give glory to God in the highest?

In order to experience that peace, a peace that will last, a peace that will not be interrupted. Let me put it this way.

[11 : 29] Have you ever wandered into a room? And as you've wandered into the room, a bit like I did this morning, you were not quite sure where you ought to be. That you're not quite sure where you're going to sit.

Right? Because it was perhaps a little bit unfamiliar. Perhaps there was a load of other people in, and you've never been in there before. And you walk in, and you're trying to find, what's my position within all of this?

Where do I fit in? And you're afraid to sit there in case someone else is sitting there. And so just momentarily, you're thinking, where do I fit in?

How do I fit in with all of this? Now, think of this in terms of God being with us. When God comes into the world, he comes into the world, and he basically says to us in our unconverted state, you're sitting in my seat.

You're at the right table. God wants you to be at his table, a table of fellowship, a table of peace. But sinfully, we're in his seat. We're in his throne.

[12 : 37] We're like our own God. And so Jesus comes into the world, and the disruption that he causes is a bit like the disruption when somebody comes into the world and says, you're in my seat.

And they have the right to sit there. It's not just like being in church where you come in and say, you're sitting in my seat. You have every right before God to say to them, it's not your seat.

Okay, but let's just imagine for a moment that there is a table with real place settings, and you're sat in the seat, and God comes into the world, and he asks you to move.

You see, the problem is, none of us naturally want to glorify God, and none of us actually do glorify God. And the way that we don't glorify God is we take up God's position on earth.

We're our own little throne room. We decide what we're going to do. We decide when we're going to do it. We decide where we're going to do it. We decide how much we're going to do, and everything.

[13 : 40] And God comes into the world, and begins to disrupt it simply by saying, you're in my seat. He wants us to have a place at his table, but we need to know what position we really have at that table.

And it's not at the head. And that's the beginning of what it means to give glory to God in the highest. That God is in the highest, that it is God's throne, that he sits there, he occupies the place at the head of the table.

And so now we begin to see what it is to give glory to God in the highest, that not only are we to recognize God's rightful position, but we are also to move.

We also have to ourselves be in the right position before God. That's what it means. So God coming into the world is all about moving us from where we have been sitting for so long into the right position.

He wants us at his table, but he doesn't want us in his seat. Give glory to God in the highest. So giving glory to God is all about positioning.

[14 : 54] God's position, God's rightful position to be the king of the world, and our position to have a seat at the table granted to us by God, but not at the head of the table.

It's all about positioning. Emmanuel, God with us, is all about positioning. Where is God and where am I and what is the relationship between us? And what about peace then?

If meeting God is like meeting a person whose chair you're sitting in, who has the rightful ownership to the chair you're sitting in, what does it mean for that owner then to give us peace?

Well, peace can only happen if we all agree that the chair, the head of the table, belongs to God. If there's not, there's disruption.

You know, we all have the Christmas table where we're sat around and someone always gets the dodgy chair or someone gets the thing that isn't even a chair and they end up finishing their meal and their back is aching.

[16 : 03] Well, why did I get it and why didn't Aunt Mabel get it if you have an Aunt Mabel? If you do, it should always be given to her. You know, why do I, right?

And so, when you argue who sits where, right, this is a discipleship issue. Do you remember the disciples the mother who said to Jesus, well, can my sons come and sit on your right side and on your left side?

You see, we all understand positioning. We all understand where we want to be and Jesus has to say things like, the first will be last and the last will be first. You know, they're all positioning issues of how we position ourselves in the light of God.

Now, if we're all in love with the same thing and we're all positioned in the right way, then it's easy to see how you can have a table fellowship that is peaceful. The trouble is, is we don't all love God and we don't all agree on what our positions ought to be on earth and therefore, we have an earth full of non-peace.

There is no peace whatsoever. And so, what God actually wants you to see is this promise of God being with you is from the vantage point of the future.

[17 : 13] that God has told you about a future in which there will come peace on the earth and it'll come when everybody loves him and when everyone is in the right position.

But that's not now. But you have to see it from that vantage point or else you won't be able to see it at all. If you don't see it from the vantage point of the new heavens and the new earth, if you don't see it from the vantage point of what God has promised, you're going to have a hard time being able to go out into the world this next week and understand how God has brought peace upon the earth.

You're not going to be able to see it because you're going to be bumping into people who are not at peace with each other and who are most definitely not at peace with God and you're going to be scratching your head thinking, well, how can Jesus be the source of peace over the whole earth when I'm faced with that when I go outside my front door?

Well, you've got to be able to see it from the vantage point of the future. You ought to see it from the vantage point of what God has promised you, that there is going to be a new heavens and a new earth.

In other words, Emmanuel means God with us and Jesus said when he was ascended or just before he was ascended that I will be with you until the end of the age, that Jesus Christ is constantly with us.

[18 : 34] We have God with us all the time and we are moving towards a time where peace will be in everybody's life and in this world completely but we're not there yet.

And so when your friend says, you know, I just don't understand how Jesus can be the formula for peace, well, of course you can't because it can only be seen from the vantage point of what God has promised.

It can only be seen from the vantage point of what God is doing. You're not going to be able to see it if you cannot see how God uses Jesus, what Jesus is doing in this world.

Jesus said a parable, didn't he? He said, the wheat and the tares grow together until that day the tares are removed from the earth. Now I know I've said this a hundred times but it's really worth repeating.

Please remember, it's not you who will be removed from the earth to heaven. That's never the way the Bible teaches it. It's the tares that are removed from the earth.

[19 : 39] The good stuff is left behind. It's the bad stuff that is taken away and is burned. We are going to be occupying a new heavens and a new earth in which peace reigns in both.

But that's a long way off. But that's the future and that's the vantage point from which we have to see this truth. That when all people are in love with the transcendent third, that then, only when all people are, that then will you have that peace on earth.

And that takes the removal of some, of many, perhaps of quite a lot. Let's go back to the transcendent third. Let me explain this a little bit more for you.

Think of it this way. How does a relationship work? Well, if you're looking for a good relationship or you're looking to be in a good relationship, what are you looking for?

Okay, and I want to suggest that Aristotle got it right. God got there before him, of course. But you're looking for someone who is in love with the same things you are. That's the making of a good relationship.

[20 : 50] The making of a good, peaceful, lasting relationship is when you look for someone who is in the same, who is in love with the same things you are. Now, if they're not, there's going to be differences in the relationship and those differences will naturally cause strain even to the point of pulling you apart.

Imagine it like this. Imagine two friends that are in love with their country. Well, you can see how that can pull them together. They're called patriots.

But imagine someone who perhaps doesn't care too much about their country. Are they going to join the club? No, I don't think so. Because of the transcendent third.

Something above and beyond themselves pulls them together. Imagine two friends who love truth. They're pulled together because of their love for something other than themselves. Imagine two friends that love goodness and beauty.

Well, now they're beginning to be pulled together because of something true and beautiful and good beyond themselves. Imagine two people who are just about to get married and they come to the pastor and they say, you know, pastor, we want to get married because we love each other.

[22 : 01] And of course, a good pastor will say, well, that sounds like a good reason, but it's really not good enough. Loving each other is not actually good enough.

You've got to be in love with a transcendent third. And you've got to be in love with a transcendent third that can pull you towards each other as you're drawn to this transcendent third.

You might have a reasonable relationship, but it's going to be a relationship that will break down over time. It may take hell for it to break down entirely, but that's where it might be heading. So how does a relationship like this work?

Well, if you're in a relationship where you're considering to marry someone who loves you and you love them, it's just not a good enough reason. Because you can continue to love them and they could choose to no longer love you a year down the line.

And that's the issue. That's the problem. What do you do when you can't control the love of another person? That's the problem.

[23 : 11] You see, when you make commitments, you're both agreeing at that point on this transcendent third. You're both agreeing that these are going to be the key issues. The trouble is, what happens when one party decides that they're not going to be committed to that anymore?

Well, you begin to have the breakdown in the peace. You begin to have the breakdown in the relationship. In other words, God understands this and so his formula of giving us Jesus has to be more complex, more beautiful, but it also has to provide a means of stopping that breakdown from happening.

So how does he do it? Well, put it this way. Because people can choose to love the same thing, they can also choose not to love the same thing. So you've got a problem. Because I can choose to love God and I can choose to love my wife, I can choose to do that, but I can't choose for my wife to love me.

Okay? I have a certain amount of control over my love for God, I have a certain amount of control over my love for my wife, but I absolutely have no real control over my wife loving me.

Her heart, her mind, her being before God. Okay? What do you do when you can't control what people love?

[24 : 32] if bearing in mind that peace is created by loving the same thing? Well, here's the answer because it's an important question. And the answer is Jesus and here's how God answers it in 1 John 4, 19.

We love, here's the whole reason why we love. Here's God explaining it as simply as he can. We love because he first loved us.

In other words, God understands that unless you love God, you cannot begin to love each other.

But there needs to be something that causes your love for God and then there needs to be something that sustains your love for God. There needs to be something that keeps you loving God.

And without loving that transcendent third, if that fails, then so does peace. If that fails, then so does relationship on earth.

[25 : 33] Peaceful, lasting, beautiful relationship on earth. All fails if God cannot sustain your love for him. And so he does.

We love. Here's the reason why I love God. It's not because I'm better than you. It's not because, you know, that I can do it whenever I choose to. The only reason why I can love God and the only reason why you can love God is because God got there first.

That when he loved you, something happened in your heart that causes you to love him back and that causes you for that love for him to be sustained forever and ever.

That's what it means to truly experience the love of God. It means that you love God back forever. It is a sustainable love. It doesn't disappear.

And so there can be no guarantee of a peaceful, lasting relationship if God is not in it. You see, it takes God to initiate a peaceful relationship, but it also takes God to sustain that peaceful, loving, lasting relationship.

[26 : 44] He is the transcendent third that pulls everything else together. He is the one thing that the two parties, even if they love each other, one neighbor loving another neighbor, is great, but it's not good enough.

A man loving his wife and a wife loving her husband is great, but it's just not good enough. You've got to be in love with the transcendent third, and that love has to be sustained.

And so God does that by loving you. And how does he love you? He gives you himself, Emmanuel. God with you.

God with us. Forever and ever. So peace is not just about being focused on each other or devoted to each other.

It's actually about being focused and devoted on God, to love God. But it's also about God giving us the virtues and blessings to make that relationship work.

[27 : 48] So here's the conclusion. Glory to God in the highest. Why? Glory to God in the highest. Why? Because it is the only way for peace to be experienced on earth.

All people need to fall in love with the transcendent third. That transcendent, ascendant third is God. It is Emmanuel, God with us. His name is Jesus.

And so that's why Jesus is the formula for peace on earth. And you'll notice as it says that glory to God in the highest. And then, and on earth, peace among those with whom God is well pleased.

In other words, as you give glory to God, that as you're giving glory to God, in that moment, you are receiving the peace of God at the same time.

Everybody's loving God. Everybody's giving glory to God. And at the same time, we're beginning to be enabled to love each other. He is the one, the only one, that can equip us, sustain us in our love for him and our love for each other.

[28 : 58] Glory to God in the highest. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.