

JESUS IS PEACE

Isaiah 9:6-7

Messiah Christmas Day Worship

December 25, 2015

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Sometimes when we think of the birth of Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem we think that it happened on a quiet and peaceful night. In fact the pictures and images we often see seem to imply quiet and solitude; the carols imply it was a silent night where all was calm.

Yet the truth is that night; that very time in history was anything but calm. Bethlehem itself was so filled with people for the census that all the lodging and rooms were full; the streets and corners were filled with edgy and agitated people.

Their world at that time was anything but peaceful. The Jewish people were under the domination of the Roman government; their taxes and treatment was extremely harsh. The ruler Herod was so paranoid about the prophecies of a new king being born that he ordered all the male children under 2-years old to be killed.

Yes, the world that Jesus was born into was harsh, cruel, chaotic; yet that is why he came. He came to be the prince of peace; he came to show that God's heart and purpose for this world is centered in peace—a peace that passes all understanding.

It is very important therefore, as we look at our world today, to remember that Jesus came to this world to bring the gift of peace. As wars continue in Afghanistan/Syria/Iraq; as Israel and Palestine continue their age-old battles; as terror groups like ISIS wreak havoc; as our US is more polarized than ever politically; as relationships and families continue to unravel—Jesus' gift of peace is as relevant now as any time in history.

Our prayer each day should be, *"Jesus, please give us peace."* God, please bring the peace of Jesus to our terror-filled world. God, please bring this peace of Jesus to our divided nation. God, please bring this peace of Jesus to my heart; to my life; to my relationships; to my world.

You may however find this idea of peace to be kind of a paradox at Christmas. This season in itself is often the complete opposite of peaceful. With lots of added busyness; schedules out of control; shopping stores filled with chaos it is often difficult to see anything peaceful.

I heard the story of two men who lived on the Florida coast. One afternoon they dropped their wives off at the mall and they went sailing out on the ocean. As they were enjoying some good sailing winds all of a sudden a terrible storm came up. They were blown and tossed so severely by this storm that they capsized in their boat.

As they hung on for dear life to their upside-down boat, with their heads and bodies bobbing in the large waves, the one man said to the other, *"Wow, this sure beats the chaos of the shopping mall!"* This in many ways may be truer than you think.

Therefore, why is this peace within us so important? Social scientists say that a lot of the anxiety and stresses of today come from rapid change. We all know that these kinds of changes are almost off the charts. Our world today is built on change.

Perhaps some of you have seen the charts that list stress points for things like changing jobs; moving to a new home; getting married; having a baby; going through surgery; facing a traumatic illness, etc. Some of you may be dealing with some of these stressful changes right now. No wonder life often seems out of control.

The government says it costs the U.S. economy hundreds of billions of dollars a year due to stress related problems. A former surgeon general pronounced that a large percentage of illnesses prior to age 65 are preventable and directly due to stress. Stress is definitely taking a toll on all of us.

Isn't it extra good news then that God places peace at the center of Christmas? However what we need to realize is that God has a different perspective on peace than we often do. God's peace centered in Jesus Christ is more than our idealized image of peace.

We of course often think of peace as the absence of something. We think that if we could only get rid of some tasks; simplify our schedules; have more time to sit and do nothing—then we will find peace and tranquility. If we could only take more time at the lake; more pampered vacations then we would relax and find peace.

Peace in the Bible, however, is rooted in the Hebrew word, “*shalom*.” This word, shalom, is not about the absence of something, but about being connected. It is about wholeness; about being settled and secure. It is not the absence of trouble or busy schedules; rather it is found in having the presence of God in us by faith.

Peace is not found in this world's self-help plans; rather it is found in being connected on a deeper level with God; with other believers; with our faith. It is then the Bible assures you will find peace in all its beauty and wholeness.

Billy Graham through his 70+ years of preaching has often laid out the four steps where you can find true peace with God. I remember hearing him share this message when I was a young boy as well as in recent years; each time I hear it I renew and recommit my life to Jesus.

The first step to find peace is to recognize God's plan. God loves you and wants to give you his plan that begins with the gift of eternal life. However, millions of people are missing out on salvation because they do not know that they are lost and living in darkness.

Only when people recognize that they need to trust Jesus Christ alone as their Savior from their sins can they recognize God's plan for their life. Jesus said in John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*”

The second step is to realize the fundamental problem...that we are separated from God. People chose to disobey God and go their own way. When sin entered the world because of Adam &

Eve's disobedience death passed to all people. The Bible says in Romans 3:24, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

Step three then is to respond to God's remedy which is centered in the cross of Christ. Jesus died, was buried and resurrected from the dead to provide the sacrificial atonement for the forgiveness of all our past, present and future sins; if we will respond to his love with faith.

It is not enough for us to just simply say we believe in Jesus. God calls us to place our trust in Jesus Christ as the substitutionary payment for our sins; God calls us to trust in Jesus as our faithful Lord and Savior; God calls us to surrender to his love and grace.

The final step is to receive God's son by faith as our Savior and Lord. As God builds the bridge and comes to us in Jesus, each person then becomes a member of God's family when you ask God to come into your life; when you receive him by faith and trust in his promises.

The Bible says in John 1:12, *"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed on his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* So today, right now we can pray that prayer of commitment:

"Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I believe you died for my sins. Right now, I turn from my sins and open the door of my heart and life. I receive you as my loving Lord and Savior. Thank you for saving me. Amen."

My friends, Jesus came to this earth at Christmas and he is the prince of peace. Let us all put our faith and trust in Jesus, our Savior and Lord. The good news is that God doesn't want to give you just some artificial or temporary peace; he wants to give you his peace which passes all understanding.

A blessed and peace-filled Christmas to each of you this day!