

“The Power of Peace”
Jonathan Rue
Luke 2:14
The Power of Christmas Series
12.24.08

In this advent season, we've been doing a series here in Joshua House called the Power of Christmas, where we've been looking at various aspects of the Christmas story that are powerful. And we've been taking a look at how those things are powerful for us in our lives today. And tonight we're going to rewind history back to that night when Jesus was born. And there were shepherds out in the fields, minding their own business. And then an angel appears to them and says I bring you great news. A savior has been born. The Messiah, the Lord. And then a whole host of angels appear. And they shout out:

SLIDE:

Luke 2:14

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Now, I don't know what those shepherds were thinking at the time, but they may have been a little bit skeptical when they heard about peace on earth. They may have said, you know, peace on earth? We've seen that. We've seen the peace of Caesar Augustus, the pax romana, the Roman Peace, the peace that is waged at the end of a sword, at the tip of a spear. Peace. Sure, for the Roman elite, but for the rest of the world, it is violent conquest. And brutal oppression of anybody that would stand in Rome's way. We've seen that peace.

And maybe tonight you here the phrase, “peace on earth,” and after watching a video like that, you're thinking, peace on earth? How can we even begin to talk about peace on earth? Before we even start looking at the world, if I even asked you what would be a descriptive phrase of the Christmas season to you? You know, many of you might not use the word peace in that descriptive phrase. I was out shopping today and peace is not the word that I would use to describe my experience. Peace on earth? I'll settle for peace at Target. Peace on earth.

You know, in our country right now, we're experiencing financial stress and difficulty. People are losing their homes. People are drowning in debt and their credit cards. In Ohio, thousand and thousands of jobs are being slashed. There are two counties now in Ohio that have double digit unemployment rates. Peace on earth? And when we look out at the earth and we see all of the hunger, the food shortages, the prices of food going up. We see pandemics of AIDS and you know, there are these diseases that we haven't even heard of that are killing just countless numbers of people.

The leading philanthropic foundation in the world is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. They started it after reading an article that talked about how millions of children around the world are dying from diseases that we've long since eradicated here in America. And half a million children a year die of something called rotavirus. And Bill and Melinda were shocked at that. They said, we've never even heard of that before. How can that be? And so they decided to do something about that. But, peace on earth?

We look at the violence and the wars around the world and all of the ongoing conflicts. We see so many genocides. We see so much oppression by dictators, that are causing violent injustice in people's lives. It's easy to become kind of cynical I think when we're thinking about peace on earth amid the overwhelming tide of violence. I read a quote that seemed unfortunately rather accurate that said, "Peace is that brief glorious moment in history when everyone stands around reloading." Bono, from the band U2, voices his frustration with peace on earth in a song that he wrote by that title. He says, "Heaven on earth? We need it now. I'm sick of all this hangin' around. Sick of sorrow. Sick of pain. Sick of hearing again and again that there's gonna be peace on earth. Jesus, this song you wrote. The words are sticking in my throat. Peace on earth. Hear it every Christmastime, but hope and history won't rhyme. So what's it worth? This peace on earth."

Well tonight, we're not going to pretend that Jesus brought us a life of tranquility. And we're not going to pretend that he gives us a world without conflict. But we are going to take seriously the proclamation of the angels, "peace on earth." So we're going to explore what kind of peace God brought to us in Jesus and what peace God brings to us at Christmas. I've called tonight's talk, The Power of Peace. Would you pray with me as we invite God to speak to us through his word?

Well something shifted in the heavens that great night when Jesus Christ was born and the angels proclaimed peace on earth. See, all throughout human history up to that point, God basically lived in heaven and revealed himself and spoke to people here on earth. But, God lived in heaven and we were down here on Earth, until this moment when Jesus Christ is born. And what we have is God coming down into the mess, into the pain, into the conflict and the turmoil of our world, to bring us peace. And that makes all the difference in the world. Doesn't it? That God could actually come down and experience what life is like here. It's a totally different thing to talk about peace after you've lived a life on earth and died on a cross. Totally different to talk about peace then, then to talk about peace from heaven.

You know after college, myself along with 95% of American college graduates, I got a job at Starbucks. So I did that for a little while until I got transferred to a Starbucks with a drive through. I'm six foot seven, and that didn't work very well.

So, I quit and I went into construction. I went into construction in the desert of California. In the summer. And we had to work during the day. So it was really hot. And I remember being up on a roof and getting really nauseous from the heat and so scrambling down the ladder because if I collapsed I didn't want to risk falling off the roof. And so on my lunch hour, I wouldn't eat anything, I would just drink a lot of water and I would go to the local supermarket and I would go to the freezer section and I would open up that freezer door and just stand there. Get some cold air on me. Well, I had two bosses. I had my foreman that worked with me. He worked in the heat, side by side. He was on the jobsite. I had a second boss. A boss that worked in an air conditioned office that occasionally would drive his air conditioned truck out to the jobsite, would take a look at things, and then would get back in his air conditioned truck and go back to his air conditioned office. Now I liked both of these guys. And I actually was friends with the bigger boss before working for him. But, after working for a while, I would've taken a bullet for my foreman. There's nothing I wouldn't have done for that guy because he experienced the heat of the work day with me. He knew exactly...when he told me to do something; he knew what he was asking me to do. There was a difference. We had a connection between us based off of our shared experience.

And that is what God does with us. God does not talk about peace with us from heaven. God came down into earth. And experienced the turmoil and the conflict of life here. And from that place, he promises three things about peace.

There's three biblical promises about peace that I want to talk about. The first biblical promise of peace is that we can have peace with God.

SLIDE:

The 3 Biblical Promises of Peace:

1) Peace with God

We can have peace with God. Now we all need peace with God. Not all of us know that we need peace with God. You know, some of us outright reject God. We at least know that we are at odds with God. We know that we're at conflict with God because something we have done. We have left. There's others of us that we just don't really realize exactly what it means that God is holy. We think "I'm a pretty good person." A lot of us here tonight maybe are feeling pretty good about ourselves because we've been generous with our relatives and we've bought and wrapped all of our gifts. Some of us still have to wrap our gifts, but at least we've bought them by now because the stores are closed. I hope you know that. But, you feel like I'm a pretty good person. But we don't understand the holiness of God. And I would just invite you out to this next sermon series we're doing on the attributes of God, called "The God You're Looking For." And we're really going to look at who God is. What are his character traits? And his attributes?

But, the big thing is that God is holy. And when we sin, as Romans 3 tells us:

Romans 3:23

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

There is nobody that's perfect. All of us have sinned. And the problem here is not just that we aren't perfect, but that God is perfect. So there's a problem. There's like a metaphysical structure of reality problem. It's not just that God doesn't want to hang around with us because he's better than us. He is perfect. He is holy. He's totally other than we are. And when we screw up, when we mess up, when we sin, when the darkness of our hearts comes out in our actions and in our thoughts, then we are separating ourselves from God. It's not something he's doing, it's something we're doing. We're creating the conflict.

So there's good news and there's bad news about that. The bad news is that God sees all of our sin. All of our faults and failures. There is nothing that we can hide from God. God knows more about you than Santa Claus does. He knows everything. He knows everything that you've ever done. The good news is that he still loves you. And he loves you enough to pursue you and make a way for you. This is why Jesus came. This is why God's son came to earth and lived a life and died on the cross that he would take your sins on himself and pay the penalty for that. This is the good news of the gospel. That God sees us as we are, that we're at enmity with God. We have created conflict between us and God by our sin, by our rebellion against God, by our turning away from God. But the good news is that God isn't just waiting to judge us, God is pursuing us. God desires relationship with us, and so that is why Jesus came. To bring peace. And so we see this in Romans 5, verse 1. Paul says:

SLIDE:

Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

We have peace with God, not because of the things we do to try to earn our peace. Not because we have come to God with a big peace treaty and try to wave a white flag and try to negotiate a deal. It's only because of Jesus Christ. That's how we gain peace with God. The first promise of peace is that we can have peace with God.

The second promise of scripture is that we can have the peace of God.

SLIDE:

The 3 Biblical Promises of Peace:

- 1) Peace with God
- 2) The Peace of God

And this is the kind of peace that everyone's looking for, right? We all want peace. We all want that sense that everything is right in the world. Right? We want security. We want financial security. Particularly in these times. I want to tell you a story of a man named Roy Rinard. 57 years old, worked for over 20 years at the same company, Portland General Electric. Well, PGE isn't some start up, fly by night company. It's a well known stable utility founded way back in 1889. This is the kind of place that people's grandparents and parents worked for and then they worked for. Solid place. Unfortunately, a few years ago, PGE was bought by a larger parent corporation, which happened to be Enron. Well, Roy Rinard didn't want to risk playing the market with his retirement so instead of investing in all kinds of different things, he had it in company stock, what he considered to be the safest route to take with his financial retirement money. So he had \$470,000 in retirement. He lost it all over night with the collapse of Enron. He says this, "It was just gone overnight. You can't imagine the feeling that everything you've worked for your whole life, your retirement, is dashed. My wife Vicki and I panicked. We would drive around and say what are we going to do now?"

Well, friend, if the peace that you're seeking is in financial security, that is such an unstable place to look for peace. You know some of us look for peace in all kind of different places. Anything that makes us feel like the world is ok. Lots of us like to buy, buy, buy. Every time we make a purchase at the mall, we get this peaceful feeling, like the world is ok. Right? Some of us like to control everything in our life. We have to have that sense where there's nothing sort of beyond our vision. We need control. A French writer called Rochefoucauld said:

SLIDE:

When we are unable to find tranquility within ourselves, it is useless to seek it elsewhere"

—François de la Rochefoucauld

And that's the truth of scripture. That's what the bible is telling us, is that we cannot find the peace that we're looking for in any other place, other than Jesus Christ. In Philippians 4, Paul says this:

SLIDE:

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This is a great benefit of being a follower of Jesus Christ. It's one of the marks of people that come to Christ, that put their faith in Christ. One of the things that

happens with so many people is they have a profound sense of peace. It's a gift of God—that the peace of God comes and brings rest to our restless hearts. And you know one question that you might ask yourself about, do you have peace in your life? How's your sleep? Are you able to sleep? Or when you lay your head on that pillow, are you thinking about the million things that you're trying to control in your life. And you're running the "what if" scenarios. And you're thinking, "Oh my gosh, I'm thinking about all this stuff." I love in Psalms, Psalms 3 and 4, the psalmist plays with this idea of sleep in both of those psalms. All of this stuff is happening in his life. You know, all this stuff is swirling around him. And he says:

SLIDE:

Psalm 3:5 I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.
6 I will not fear though tens of thousands
assail me on every side.

Psalm 4:8 In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, LORD,
make me dwell in safety.

When we trust in the Lord, one of the benefits is we can sleep. Because you don't have to worry about you managing everything in life, controlling everything in the world around you. You can trust in God. And you can also have a clear conscience. There is nothing better than laying your head on that pillow with a clear conscience before God. And feeling the rest of God, of knowing that you belong to God. The great spiritual writer and bishop in the church, St. Augustine said:

SLIDE:

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. —St. Augustine

The third biblical promise of peace is peace with others.

SLIDE:

The 3 Biblical Promises of Peace:

- 1) Peace with God
- 2) The Peace of God
- 3) Peace with others

Not only does God give us peace with himself, give us peace in our lives, but he enables us to have peace with other people in our relationships. And this is something that God helps us with. And for the sake of time, I'm not going to develop this as much as I'd like to, but I'll say in Hebrews 12:14, the author says:

SLIDE:

Hebrews 12:14

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone

And in 1 Thessalonians 5:13, Paul says:

SLIDE:

1 Thessalonians 5:13

Live in peace with each other.

This is something that God both helps us to do and invites us into. When we experience the peace of God in our lives, then God invites us into producing peace in our relationships, so that we as Christians, there really ought to be a difference in the way that we relate to each other. And I love to hear in small groups that I've been a part of, I love to hear when people come into a small group environment, people from our church meeting in homes together, people come in and say, something felt different. People love each other. They accept you in. I just love this place. That's what the Christian community is all about, is us fostering peace in our relationships with one another. Well, how do we get there? How do we find peace, the peace that we're looking for?

I want to talk about a couple of things on the pathway to peace. The pathway to peace. And the first thing that I want to mention is the first place that we start is we give glory to God.

SLIDE:

The Pathway to Peace:

1) Give glory to God

So the angels proclaimed, Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

SLIDE:

Luke 2:14

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

We begin by giving glory to God. And people miss peace in their life because they want that second part. They want "on earth peace," but they don't want the first part. They don't want to give glory to God. And it doesn't work like that. If we want peace on earth, we begin with giving Glory to God. What does that mean? Giving glory to God? First thing that means is that we recognize that he is God and that we're not. You know when we give glory to God, what we're saying is ok, Lord you are in control. You're sovereign. You're the one running the universe. And so I don't get to run the universe. I don't get to run, I don't get

to call the shots in everything that happens in my life. I don't get to manage other people's lives.

You know, are you still under the illusion that you really can control your life? Because that's one thing that so many people run up against. Year after year. And it's a total illusion. That we really can control things that happen in our lives. We can take steps to help that, but you can't control your health. You can't control what's going to happen with other people around you. You can't control accidents that might happen or things that are outside of what you have any influence over. God is running the show, and so when we give glory to God, we're saying, "Lord you are in control." The great reformer Martin Luther used to say to his young pupil, Philip Melancthon. He used to say, "Philip, stop trying to rule the world." And I think that's something that all of us need to hear from time to time. So you can just insert your name in there, and just hear me gently say,

SLIDE:

____(your name)___ stop trying to rule the world.

We all do this, because we all have a world of our own lives. You may not be exercising as much authority as the president of the United States, but you have a world that you're ruling over. And so the first step in us finding peace with God and peace in our lives is giving glory to God. Giving glory to God. And recognizing that he is sovereign over all and secondly, recognizing that he's a lot smarter than you or I, right? God knows way more. He sees everything and his thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts. And so back to Philippians 4:

SLIDE:

Philippians 4:7

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

We see that the peace of God, Paul says, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. God transcends all understanding. He's way smarter than we are. So, the first thing is give glory to God. The second pathway to peace is to rest in the favor of God.

SLIDE:

The Pathway to Peace:

- 1) Give glory to God
- 2) Rest in the favor of God

Rest in the favor of God. You know we don't have to strive to find favor with God. That's where we start. You know when the angel is proclaiming glory to God in highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests, he's talking about you.

SLIDE:

Luke 2:14

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

God’s favor rests on you. I have a niece, Peyton, she’s five now. My favor rests on that little girl. She didn’t have to do anything at all to earn my love. I’ve loved her since the day she was born. And when I go home for Christmas in a couple weeks, she doesn’t have to be anxious about if she was a good little girl this year, to Uncle Jonathan Rue. That’s what she calls me because she has another uncle named Jonathan too. So, Uncle Jonathan Rue. She doesn’t have to like, worry, did I perform well enough? Was I nice to him enough? Did I laugh at his jokes? You know? It’s my pleasure, it’s one of the sweeter pleasures of life to give Peyton a gift and watch her get excited about it, which doesn’t always happen cause she’s a kid and she’s honest. So sometimes she’s like, ok, but that’s ok. I still give her gifts. That’s how God is with us. God’s favor rests on you. You don’t have to make yourself better, clean up your life in order to make yourself worthy of God’s favor, to try to put on a good face so that God will like you. God loves you. He’s crazy about you and his favor rests on you.

Third thing. Embrace the prince of peace.

SLIDE:

The Pathway to Peace:

- 1) Give glory to God
- 2) Rest in the favor of God
- 3) **Embrace the Prince of Peace**

Third thing, the pathway to peace is to embrace the prince of peace. See what we’re talking about tonight is not kind of the UN principles of how do we all get along and find peace together. We’re not talking about that kind of a plan. We’re talking about a person. The peace that you’re seeking in your life goes directly through the person of Jesus Christ. That’s where it goes. There is no other way to find the kind of peace that you’re seeking in your life. There’s nothing you can buy. There’s no kind of success ladder that you can climb. There’s no amount of friends that you can have in your life that are going to give you the kind of peace that comes from the person of Jesus Christ. Prince of Peace is his name. Isaiah calls him this 800 years before he’s born. Isaiah says in Isaiah 9:6:

SLIDE:

Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given...
And he will be called...Prince of Peace.

So before Jesus is born, this is his title. He is the prince of peace. And then we see through his life the manifestation of that and then afterward the apostle Paul is writing about him in Ephesians 2:14

SLIDE:

Ephesians 2:14

For he himself is our peace

And Paul makes this radical statement about Jesus that he himself is our peace. He himself, the person of Jesus is our peace. This is radical. This is the power of peace at Christmas.

SLIDE:

The Power of Peace

It's Jesus. It's not the power of Caesar Augustus that earns peace at the edge of a sword through violence and oppression and manipulation. The peace that God gives us is in the person of Jesus Christ. And the good news is that we get ultimate peace in the sense that one day God will make all things new. God will set every wrong to right. And there is so much peace in that, knowing that one day all conflict, all wars, all of the strife and turmoil of the earth will be done. And there will be peace. That's where we're headed for in God.

But that's not even the whole thing. That is a benefit. But what Paul is saying in Ephesians 2 is that we get Jesus. He himself is our peace. Our peace doesn't just come from knowing we have security, so we'll be ok in the future. That's not the driving power of peace in the Bible. The power of peace is that Jesus Christ is our peace. And we get to embrace him. We get to have relationship with Jesus. We get to draw him into ourselves. And know him intimately. We get to spend time with him and commune with him and have him be a vibrant part of our life. We get Jesus. And Jesus tells us that in John 16:33, he doesn't sugar coat it, he says:

SLIDE:

John 16:33

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

So yes, there's still war and violence and famine and disease and all of these things. But, we can know that Jesus has overcome it. That we are headed toward a future that doesn't include any of that. And it is coming more and more and more as the kingdom of God is established on the earth. But we can take even more heart in the fact that Jesus himself is our peace. That Jesus walks with us through everything that we go through. And let me just tell you friend if you haven't experienced this, everything in life changes. When you receive Jesus Christ into your life. Your perspective on everything changes. If Jesus is

the most important person in your life, then everything else doesn't take that place of all consuming. There just, you know, life can't get that bad if you know Jesus. And it's not because your circumstances change, it's because you know Jesus. You have God living in you and walking with you in relationship day after day.

BULLETIN OUTLINE:

Peace on earth?

The 3 Biblical Promises of Peace

- 1) Peace with God
- 2) The Peace of God
- 3) Peace with others

The Pathway to Peace

- 1) Give glory to God
- 2) Rest in the favor of God
- 3) Embrace the Prince of Peace

The Power of Peace