



<b>Series:</b> Advent	<b>Reference:</b> Luke 2:13-14	<b>Title:</b> The Power of Peace	<b>Date:</b> 12.10.17
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
How has Christ brought Peace when we look out upon a world filled with Chaos? That's the question we struggle with today. We find that Peace exists not in the absence of surrounding danger, or turmoil, but in the presence of God's reign reflected in the hearts & actions of his people.			

### **Color changes in text indicate slide changes**

#### **-SLIDE PERSON: PLEASE RECORD THE SERMON-**

Advent, the time we celebrate the in-breaking Kingdom of God by the birth of Jesus. Last week we looked at the Power of Hope. Today we look at the Power of Peace Christ brings.

But...it would seem there's no peace to be had in our world! Between tax reform, Trump's Tweets, North Korea, badly behaved men in seats of power, war & racism, peace seems an elusive fairy tale.

One study reports, since the beginning of recorded history, the entire world has been at peace less than 8% of the time. Out of the last 3600 years of recorded history alone, only 286 years have seen peace - and they've not recorded every conflict. Moreover, in excess of 8000 recorded peace treaties have been made & broken.

Never-mind the greater world, many of us don't feel peace in our personal lives, emotional turmoil overflows into relational conflict. Peace eluding us from macro to micro level.

Jesus entered into a chaotic violent world. His coming seemed to ignite more turmoil & violence...born in Bethlehem, Judea, an obscure little town 6 miles from Jerusalem with a population of about 300 nestled in the mighty Roman Empire. To Mary, a teenage girl; into a world of Jews & Gentiles under Roman authority, Jewish Chief Priests & Teachers of the Law, a mixture of men who lived their lives in a political dance between Roman authority & the Jewish nation. Jesus, like his mother, would seem hardly a threat to the Empire, but we find he was & Rome reacted.

Caesar's in the background of his story. The Roman Ruler, who'd coined the term 'Good News' or 'Gospel' for his own government. Regarded as deity, rites of worship had been established for him. His rule was referred to as the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. Billed to be the 'Good News' or 'Gospel', the solution to peace & order in the world; the everlasting empire.

Jesus, whose message would later usurp this Caesarean title of Gospel, or Good News, is born under Caesar's rule. The promise of peace through the fear & control of Rome is contrasted with the promise of peace through the humility of Christ. Caesar ruled over people pushing them down. Jesus loves from underneath lifting people up.

Although they never meet, Jesus undoes & surpasses the rule of Caesar Augustus. The peace of Rome under Caesar, wasn't peace at all, it was fear. His rule was overtaken by

the peace of Christ. Jesus' authority established, not through sword, rather loving sacrifice. Jesus had come *not* to conquer & subjugate, but to overcome sin & death setting people free. Rome came in chariots. Jesus in a manger - the most non-threatening form possible, bringing real hope & peace.

The word 'Gospel' would be usurped to mean the rule of Christ, robbing Caesar of his glory & giving it rightly to Jesus! Caesar Augustus is mentioned only once in the Scriptures to set the date of Christ's entrance into the world. The unraveling of Caesar's power had begun in a stable in the shadow of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire wasn't everlasting, but Christ's kingdom reign is.

The Roman senate gave Herod, one of Caesar's regional kings, the title 'king of the Jews'. A title which took 3 years of brutal warfare to establish. This follows the century long Maccabean revolt. At the end of which violence had broken out. It took Rome thirty years to squash the rebellion, finally installing Herod as their own 'King of the Jews' to establish 'peace' by iron fist. Herod's throne had been threatened by Jews before; he didn't want it done again.

Peace in Rome came at a high price. Herod killed two brothers-in-law, his own wife, and two of his own sons. He ordered the massacre of all first born male Jewish children in fear of this coming 'Jewish King'. He rounded up innocent citizens five days before his death, ordering them to be executed the day he died to insure proper mourning. Herod & Caesar ruled by fear, not a day passed without an execution under Herod's rule.

'When Herod heard the 'King of the Jews' had been born *he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him*. Even as an infant Jesus posed a threat to Herod, the half Jewish king, who knew the prophecy of Micah, the 'king of the Jews' would threaten to his rule. When Herod's upset, everybody's upset, because when Herod's upset, people die. Herod the Great was 'King of the Jews'; a roman ruler of Gentiles & Jews alike.

Jesus was a king born to rule both Gentile & Jew as well. Parallels & further fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham; the promised Messiah throughout Scripture. A promise of 'light for revelation to the Gentiles' - 'a sign for all nations' - as it says in Luke. Messiah was for all people, beyond the borders of Israel, the true peace being offered to all nations; even Rome. The parallel's between these rulers & Jesus are many & layered.

Herod's son, 'Herod the tetrarch' (Lk. 3:19, *etc.*), or Herod Antipas, was the one who imprisoned & executed John the Baptist (Mk. 6:14-28), and the one Jesus was sent to by Pilate for judgment (Lk. 23:7ff.). Jesus is recorded as having once described him as 'that fox' (Lk. 13:31f.). Herod's family, an ongoing torment to Jesus from birth to cross. Herod & Rome constantly trying to squash the hope & peace Christ brought.

God came in the most peaceful form he could; God's Kingdom in contrast with the worlds. Fear under Rome's false peace, contrasted with Jesus bringing true peace. Then three 'unclean' foreign Gentile 'kings' come to worship him. Tradition calls them kings. They weren't. They were Magi. Magi were king-makers. King-makers declaring a new

king was a threat to Herod & Caesar. Whoever they bow their knee in worship to, would be recognized as king. Early church tradition says there were 12, later reduced to 3, given the number of gifts. But it doesn't tell us how many, or where they hailed from.

The visit of the Magi from the East, maybe as far as India, was a clear indication Gentiles can participate in the kingdom of God alongside Jews (Isa. 60:6). Although they weren't Jewish, the Magi followed the light God gave them; confirmed their steps by the Hebrew Scriptures & obeyed God without question leading straight to Jesus. Matthew, writing to Jews, included the story of the wise men from the East. Luke, writing to Gentiles, included the story of the Jewish shepherds. Together showing Christ would bring peace to Jew & Gentile, all nations, breaking down the walls of hostility spoken of in Ephesians 2. Roman peace came at the threat of death, Christ's in overcoming death.

So, if we think we live in tumultuous times, with questionable people in positions of power, be it politics, business, or Hollywood, think of the time Jesus was born & to the characters who occupied his life. **Someone once said, "Know Jesus, know peace. No Jesus, no peace." A true statement taking both thought & experience to understand in a world so chaotic.**

Our anchor passage today is Luke 2:13-14, *Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God & saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

When Angels declare an in-breaking of Christmas *peace*, of what sort of peace did they speak? Because we may say, "I don't see it, between all the racism, sexism, war, failing marriages & vitriolic words." Or, whatever occupies our personal chaos.

However, the hope is, looking at all the turmoil surrounding his birth, we notice - no matter what's happening in the political scene, God's plan moves forward quietly unnoticed in the background. Hardly anyone would've noticed a teenage couple as they nursed the baby Messiah. Jesus moves quietly bringing peace to the world; God's plan going according to plan, always.

Herod & Caesar did their best to squash & undermine this simple Jewish man's entrance & ministry to the world; even killed him. But he walked, taught & rose from the dead accomplishing all he set out to do despite their best efforts. God's kingdom of peace will reign no matter what we see on the national, or international landscape. Moving forward no matter what Republicans, Democrats, dirty politicians, or cops, power hungry sexually depraved movie moguls, badly behaved actors & comedians, or anyone else does. The peace of Christ's Kingdom has broken onto the scene. Already, but not totally fulfilled yet. But the promise of hope is, God's peace will reign in full at some time in the future - and for now, we get glimpses of it in our personal lives, and in relationship with others when we follow Jesus well.

We heard it in the testimonies of our own people a few weeks back. From Dani struggling to understand the loss of her brother, to Meghan's former battle with heroin addiction. Both found peace in their journey with Christ in these difficult situations.

We see it in stories if we listen well past popular news. Did you see the story of the cop who recently rolled up on two heroin addicts shooting up next to a highway. The woman 8 months pregnant. The cop said, "You're gonna kill your baby!" She immediately began to cry. His demeanor changed. Compassion welled up within him. Something told him to adopt the child. He'd been praying for a way to make a difference - there it was shooting up heroin by the side of the road. Three weeks later he was holding his adopted daughter. And the woman now lives with at least a little peace & hope that her daughter's growing up in a safe loving environment - she said the officer was so kind & sweet to her; no one ever talked like he did to her. An agent of peace.

Peace exists not in the absence of surrounding danger or turmoil, but in the presence of God's reign reflected in the hearts & actions of his people.

There was once a king who offered a prize to the artist who could paint the best picture of peace. Many tried. The king looked at all the paintings. Only two were worthy of consideration.

The first was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror with peaceful towering soft forested mountains all around it. Overhead, a blue sky, sunshine & fluffy white clouds. Everyone thought this the perfect image of peace.

The other painting had mountains. But they were rugged & bare. Above them, an stormy lightning-filled sky. Down the mountain raged a waterfall. It didn't look peaceful at all.

But when the king looked closely, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water & stormy weather, sat the bird on her nest in perfect peace.

The king chose the second. "Because," he explained, "peace doesn't mean to be in a place where there's no noise, trouble, hard work, or danger. Peace means to be in the midst of chaos with a calm heart."

Jesus empowers us to find calm in the storm of life. If we look at Luke 8:22-24 using it as a metaphor, we see he comes with power to bring peace...*One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake.... He got up & rebuked the wind & the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.*

When that officer rolled up on that woman, he was being Jesus to her, bringing calm to the storms of her life. No storm's too big for His peace to break in with calming, quieting power. Many times when people face a major decision & choose to pray about it you'll hear them eventually say about their final decision, "I just have a peace about it."

Meaning, they've found calm amidst the chaos, feeling God's there leading them in this decision no matter the outcome. Peace.

The Hebrew word for peace, *Shalom*, speaks of peace which breaks in where fear holds court. When my wife & I were having a difficult time, not getting along, I wasn't behaving well towards her due to the stress I'd endured for a long period of time, her friend spoke words of peace to Kim. She said, "I am gonna pray you'd have compassion on your husband." That struck Kim changing her demeanor towards me, which broke my heart - calming the storm of our relationship as Christ broke through. All the issues still there, but calm had come in the midst of chaos. Peace.

Meghan lived in a personal storm of addiction until Christ broke into her life & calmed the waters bringing much needed peace to her soul. Another couple I know were in a raging relational storm as the husband found out his wife had been unfaithful. She was in turmoil thinking he'd never forgive her. We talked about the peace Jesus could bring to their relationship & prayed. When they left, he said to her, "I still love you." The waves settled in her heart, hope flowered once more. All the issues hadn't gone away, but Christ had entered in & brought peace to navigate troubling waters.

And for those of us who've walked with Jesus, we know he brings peace to our troubled minds when needed. In Luke 8:27-35 it tells this story, *When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice...* Formerly tormented, this man's suddenly sitting, in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus. Free from being controlled within – and the resulting peace would follow him the rest of his life.

We talked a few weeks back in our Animate series about the Accuser (Satan) & the thoughts about self & others which are produced by listening to his lies. Duke University did a study on *peace of mind* which is reflective of those things we discussed. Interestingly, the factors found to contribute greatly to *peace of mind* are the opposite of what we experience when we listen to the Accuser - godly scriptural characteristics including...

- 1) *The absence of suspicion & resentment.* Nursing a grudge was a major factor in unhappiness. (Colossians 3:13 - *Bear with each other & forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*)
- 2) *Not living in the past.* An unwholesome preoccupation with old mistakes & failures leads to depression. (live out of your identity in Christ, not letting the past define you - 2 Corinthians 5:17 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*)
- 3) *Not wasting time & energy fighting conditions you can't change.* Cooperate with life, instead of trying to run away from it. (Psalm 23 - *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...*)

- 4) *Force yourself to stay involved with the living world.* Resist the temptation to withdraw & become reclusive during periods of emotional stress. (Iron sharpens Iron; our Unity talk two weeks ago - Galatians 6:2 - *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*)
- 5) *Refuse to indulge in self-pity when life hands you a raw deal.* Accept the fact that nobody gets through life without some sorrow & misfortune. (Romans 5:3-4 - *we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.* / 1 Peter 4:12-13 - *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*)
- 6) *Cultivate the old-fashioned virtues - love, humor, compassion & loyalty.* (Romans 12:2 - *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.*)
- 7) *Do not expect too much of yourself.* When there is too wide a gap between self-expectation & your ability to meet the goals you have set, feelings of inadequacy are inevitable. (Galatians 6:3-4 - *If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else*)
- 8) *Find something bigger than yourself to believe in.* Self-centered egotistical people score lowest in any test for measuring happiness. (Jesus said in Mt 6:33 - *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* / Romans 8:37-39 - *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*)

Isn't it funny - sponsored studies reinforce Scripture! How much effort & time we spend wringing our hands in worry, searching out answers when it has, and always will be, found right here in the Living Word with Jesus.

Many times we allow worry to override our peace...

- 1) *Worry affects trust in God.* When a concern arises, we have a choice; worry or trust. You can't do both. The choice to worry, is to choose not to trust Jesus.
- 2) *Worry affects relationships.* When you're worrying, you're not your best self; on edge snappy, losing composure.
- 3) *Worry affects health.* Many illnesses are a result of stress, anxiety & worry.
- 4) *Worry affects witness.* People notice; actions speak louder than words.

Practice yielding to Jesus by crying out. Welcome Him to take control. Ephesians 2:14a states, *"For he himself is our peace..."* If we hold onto Jesus, meeting him consistently in the Inner Sanctum, we'll be transformed; life will prove much easier, not so frightening, a lot less worrisome. The Hebrew word Shalom (Peace) means a total wellbeing



extending to community. Shalom isn't possible if we're hiding anger, wrath, hurt, worry, or disappointment. Complete wellbeing comes in attitudes which align with God's Word leading to wellness in health & relationships.

Having Peace doesn't mean there's no crisis or difficult circumstances, it means, in the midst of it all, there's a total wellbeing of your heart. Just because someone is *AT* Peace with God (salvation), doesn't mean that they're walking *IN* the Peace of God (sanctification). We must walk this out with Jesus, allowing the Spirit of God through His Word, to transform our thinking & bring Peace.

I leave you with two verses today... *Philippians 4:6, 7 - <sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer & petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts & your minds in Christ Jesus.*

And *Colossians 3:15 - "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful."*

You can make the choice to let the peace of God reign; governing life, actions, emotions & decisions. I challenge you over Christmas to commit these two verses to memory. Choose not to be anxious - pray, be thankful. Choose to let the peace of God rule in your heart & relationships & see what God will do.