

The Peace of Christmas

Jesus is born in Bethlehem – The shepherds visit Jesus:

Luke 2:8-14 - Glory in the Highest - 8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

14 “*Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”*

Some of the Jews were waiting for a savior to deliver them from Roman rule; others hoped the Messiah would deliver them from physical ailments.

- Jesus healed them and established his spiritual kingdom.
- He delivered them from sin.

People often set their own agenda for Jesus and thus expect too little from him.

- His work is far reaching, *more than we can imagine...*
- He has paid the price for sin and opened a way to Peace with God.
- He offers us new hearts, which are ours for eternity.

1 – Its Source - *Peace is often the most sought after* - and the most elusive - treasure. *The great cry of the world is for peace*.

The diligent and devoted effort of many world leaders and diplomats **is for peace**, yet *history seems to mock their efforts and confirm* that such a search is **futile**.

A historian estimated that there had been 3130 years of war in contrast to 227 years of peace from the 15th century **before Christ**, to his day.

- The world had seen **13 years of war for every year of peace**.

Nuclear destruction still threatens civilization.

- We live under an ominous cloud that threatens to unleash a nuclear holocaust. **NO Peace**.

The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. We need peace with God -
Within ourselves - With others

James 3:18 - Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

When peacemakers plant seeds of peace, they will harvest justice (or goodness).

Never underestimate the power of a seed that is sown in fertile soil.

- One can take a seed the size of a freckle, put it under several inches of soil, give it water, light, and fertilizer, and get ready for action.
- It doesn't matter if the ground is a zillion times heavier than the seed.
- That seed will push its' way through.

Place- Europe. Time - 1934. Hitler's plague of anti-Semitism was infecting a continent. Some would escape; some would die. But 11-year-old Heinz would learn from it. He would learn the power of sowing seeds of peace.

Heinz was a Jew. His people clung to the religious traditions that held them together.

Hitler's young thugs were overrunning the little village where Heinz lived. Tensions mounted in the streets. They became a battleground. **Young Heinz learned to keep his eyes open.** When he saw a band of troublemakers, he would step to the other side of the street to escape a fight. Sometimes he could not.

One day the young boy found himself face to face with a Hitler bully.

- He thought he would be beat up.
- This time, however, **he walked away unhurt** - not because of what he did, but because of what he said.
- He didn't fight back; **he spoke up**.
- He convinced the troublemakers that a fight was unnecessary.
- **His words held the battle at bay**.
- And Heinz saw firsthand how **the tongue could create peace**.

He learned the skill of using words to avoid conflict and had many opportunities to work on it.

Fortunately, his family escaped and made their way to America. **Later in life, he would downplay the impact those experiences had upon his development.**

After Heinz grew up, his name became synonymous with peace negotiations.

- His legacy became that of a bridge builder.
- He had learned the power of the properly placed word of peace.

America never knew him as Heinz. We know him by his Anglicized name, Henry.

- Kissinger. *Never underestimate the power of sowing a seed of peace.*

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2 - Its Secret - See if you can paint in your mind a picture of peace.

Most would visualize a quiet, tranquil, well-ordered scene with -
An absence of any sense of conflict.

When we look at the portrait of the Prince of Peace painted in the scriptures, it shatters our mental image.

In the Garden of Eden, the harmonious *relationship between God and man was broken; at the cross it was mended*.

Only God could have provided a means of re-establishing fellowship.

Only He had the power to remove the estrangement resulting from man's sin and disobedience.

From the slaves of sin to slaves of God: Romans 6:20 - For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

- **When you were slaves of sin, you didn't have to please God.**
- It is impossible to be neutral. Our master is either sin or God.

It's not very peaceful looking at a picture of a Roman soldier clothed in armor.

- In fact, it seems more warlike than peaceful.
- Scripture says: "**feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.**"

Ephesians 6:15 - With your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from **the gospel of peace**.

Your desire to tell the good news about peace should be like shoes on your feet.

The peace that comes to mankind through Christ's provision for redemption is not of the inferior quality in those things that are man-made.

- All our human efforts were doomed to failure.
- Rather, this peace is "God-made.

If the situation had been left in the hands of mankind, **there would have been no reconciliation**.

- The price of redemption was beyond the purchase power of mere mortals.

To restore our oneness with God, to perfect us and make us complete, the greatest act of violence in all of history was committed.

- There could be no superficial glossing over the problem of sin.

Christ paid the full price for our peace at Calvary.

A. Jesus, the Lamb of God

The ominous clouds of war were sweeping over Judah when Isaiah prophesied, the prophet wrote -

Isaiah 8:6 - 6 These people have refused the gentle waters of Shiloah and have gladly gone over to the side of King Rezin and King Pekah.

Therefore, God would bring judgment upon them with: Isaiah 8:7 - 7 Now I will send the king of Assyria against them with his powerful army, which will attack like the mighty Euphrates River overflowing its banks.

The nation had a false hope, an unholy covenant, and a misplaced fear.

Isaiah 8:13 - The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, And let Him be your dread.

Isa 9:1 - Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.

What is said in the previous chapter of the calamities that are coming upon Israel. **It shall not be unbroken darkness, and constant calamity, for the rising of the great light that shall shine on the dark land of Zebulun and Naphtali shall interrupt it.**

The time here was probably the invasion of the land by Tiglath-Pileser.

In that invasion, the parts of Zebulun and Naphtali were particularly afflicted.
Tiglath-pileser took Zebulun and Naphtali and carried them captive to Assyria.

They were represented as walking in darkness, because -

- They were far from the temple and from God.

- They were intermingled with the pagan
- And were rude and coarse in their manners and in their language

Isaiah 9:2 - The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined.

- Light is not only an emblem of knowledge in the Scriptures, but of joy, rejoicing, and deliverance.
- It stands opposed to moral darkness, and to times of judgment and calamity.

One day The Messiah would come to that dark region and become both its light and its deliverer.

Isaiah may have referred to the immediate deliverance of the nation from impending calamities, but there is a **fullness and richness of the language that seems to apply only to the Messiah**. The ref. in Matt 4 Bears out this truth.

Matthew 4:13-17 - 13 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:

16 The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."

17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"

Isa 9:3 - *You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.*

The idea is that of death, **as a dark substance or being that casts a long and chilly shadow** over the land **as it stands between the land and the light**.

- **The picture is one of ignorance, misery, and disaster.**

Death, in the Old Testament scriptures, **was especially represented as extending his long and sinister shadow over the regions of departed spirits**.

Isa 9:4 - *For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian.*

The word 'staff' here may mean a **bough, a branch, a staff, stick, or rod.** It seems to indicate how punishment is inflicted, or as a mark of servitude. Israel would suffer oppression, bondage and servitude.

'As in the day of Midian' *refers to the remarkable deliverance* that was accomplished under Gideon against the Midianites. It was accomplished not by human strength, but by the power of God.

Isa 9:5 - For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, **Will be used** for burning and fuel of fire.

This is a description of the usual effect of war.

- The image of war is that of a **clanging noise** made by the armor of soldiers,
- And by garments that have been **dipped in human blood.**
- It is a very revolting, **but accurate,** portrayal of battle.

In ancient times it was **customary to strip the dead that were slain in a defeated army,** and to collect their armor, their chariots, etc., and **burn them.**

Isaiah is contrasting the victory that God will give Israel with all human victories.

*Theirs are with confused commotion and bloodshed; but this of the Lord shall be, as in the victory over Midian, with His own hand alone, and **by 'flaming fire' from heaven.***

*The Assyrian was not destroyed by human battle and bloodshed, but **by divine intervention.***

Isa 9:6 - For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

A child is to be born unto Israel.

This speaks of Immanuel, the child of the Virgin, **whose birth was prophesied in Isa 7:14.**

This child is to be the gift of God, on which man had no claim, "for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son".

He is described as "**Wonderful**" because, amazingly, even though He is a child, yet he is the "everlasting Father".

- The word "Wonderful" expresses many things about the Christ who was to come.
- **The manner of his birth was wonderful; his humility, his self-denial, his sorrows were wonderful; his mighty works were wonderful; his dying agonies were wonderful, as well as his resurrection and ascension.**
- **All that he was and did evoke admiration and wonder.**

The name "counselor" here, **denotes one of honorable rank**; one who is suited to stand near princes and kings as their adviser.

- It is expressive of **great wisdom**, and of **qualifications to guide and direct** the human race.

The Prince of Peace. Christ is our Tranquillizer; **the one who calms our nerves**.

- **He came to bring ultimate peace on earth by the blood of his cross.**

Like a flash of light in a sky of total darkness, Isaiah prophesied of One whose name reveals His power to take away all insecurity.

- **What a name this would be!**
- **Invested with all power, it would dissolve all fear.**

Isa 9:6 clearly identified **the fullness of God in Christ Jesus** hundreds of years before His birth.

Matthew 28:19 - Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

There is but **one name** mentioned there, as in **Matt 28:19**.

The text obviously speaks of Jesus Christ, for **who else could have been** "a child . . . born" and yet "the mighty God"?

Who else could be "a son . . . given" and yet "The everlasting Father"?

Only the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, whose name was called "Immanuel" could have fulfilled all these titles. Isa 7:14

Throughout the Bible there is a picture of divine power and authority, as one could well expect, but **there is also a picture of divine peace.**

It is true that God holds a royal scepter of authority, but **He also holds an olive branch of peace.**

Christ was to become ***our "propitiation,"*** our mercy seat upon which the sacrificial blood is sprinkled.

Through the shed blood of Jesus Christ at Calvary, the holiness of God was fully satisfied.

Jesus is "The Prince of Peace"; he is the undisputed, unparalleled, surpassing winner of every Nobel peace prize man can ever award.

3. Its Strength - A story has been told of a competition to best illustrate on canvas the concept of strength of peace. Tranquil scenes were painted by several contestants, but **the artist who won the competition painted something uniquely different.**

His painting showed a wild storm sweeping above a precipice. Huddled beneath the edge of the cliff, **sheltered and secure, was a nest of small birds.**

Paul had found refuge in the supreme peace of God.

Despite the hardships of imprisonment, the apostle spoke of being kept (or guarded) **by the peace of God.**

There may have been times when fear and discouragement could have overwhelmed Paul, but **he had discovered a security in Christ** that nothing could shake.

Paul was perpetually guarded by a quiet confidence in his Savior.

Christmas season excites emotions and passions of the believer that run deeper than those of the unbeliever.

The qualities that heal and sustain us were born at the first Christmas: **joy, hope, peace and love.**

But those who are ignorant of the gospel, or who choose not to believe the good tidings, have no joy; they are without hope; there is no peace in their hearts; and they are bankrupt of true love.

None of these are self-derived; neither can they be purchased; rather, they are by-products of knowing the Lord.

- The hope of the godless will perish and be gone,
- But to those who acquaint themselves with the Lord, there is peace.
- Good shall come unto them.

This is the time of year when the number of suicides increases. Why? Because of depression, loneliness, despair, sorrow, grief, self-hatred, and inner turmoil.

If you are being tormented by any of these emotions or feelings, I commend you to Christ Jesus.

Lay your burden of sin and guilt at the foot of his cross and let the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in Jesus' name, give you a peace that is out of this world.

There is no need to let your heart be troubled or afraid any longer.

The babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger was more than a picture of peace.

He was peace personified. And he still is.

Peace is often the most sought after - and the most elusive - treasure.