

The Good News That Gives Peace

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Luke 2:8-18

Merry Christmas! I am honored to be able to bring you God's Word this morning. This morning we are going to look at arguably one of the most well-known passages in all the Bible. In Luke 2 we find the story of the birth of Jesus. I hope and pray this morning that even though this story is a well-known passage for you, that you would not grow immune or be in awe and the greatest news ever told.

Illustration:

Nicholas Ridley was a hero of the faith. Born in 1502, he later became a Bishop in London. He was known as a man who preached the true doctrine of Christ, was a man who lived what he preached and sought God fervently in prayer.

Around the time of the Reformation, Ridley along with others fought for the truth of Scripture. When Queen Mary I, who was known as "Bloody Mary" for having over 200 people killed, threw Ridley into prison. He was then taken to Oxford where he was essentially placed on trial for his beliefs. After not backing down from his Christian beliefs he was labeled a heretic and sentenced to be burned at the stake.

The night before he was executed his brother offered to stay all night with him in prison. Ridley refused and made this amazing statement. "For I mind (God willing) to go to bed, and to sleep as quietly tonight, as I ever did in my life."

How can someone make a statement like that and plan to sleep like a baby the night before they knew they were going to die for their faith. Only by the peace that God brings. Ridley understood the peace of God that as Scripture tells us, surpasses all understanding.

Who can receive the peace of God? How can you receive it? What is the peace of God anyway? Luke says this:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

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

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

- Luke 2:8-18

This passage of Scripture centers around the good news that was given to the Shepherds. So, this morning we are going to answer 3 questions in this passage about this Good News that was told.

1. What is the Good News?
2. What is the result of the Good News?
3. What are we supposed to do with the Good News?

What is the Good News?

When would the Messiah come? The one promised to save God's people. The Old Testament ended with Malachi proclaiming that one would come to prepare the way for the Messiah comes but then, hundreds of years of silence. Would he come as God promised? Would he come as the prophets predicted? And then it happened! Jesus was born.

Surely, this news of the Savior of the World being born would be given first to... Kings? Priest? The rich? The prestigious? The super spiritual people? Right? Luke in his gospel tells us:

There were shepherds who were out in a field minding their own business as they worked. They were in a field a few miles outside of Bethlehem

Shepherds at this time would watch their sheep in shifts through the night to keep the sheep for thieves or animals. (Gilbert knows about those night shifts.) And then all of a sudden, an angel appears before them. They were absolutely terrified. But the angel told them not to be afraid and it had some Good News to share that would bring Joy to all people.

Wait, God wanted to tell Shepherds, of all people. Who were on the bottom of the social ladder, not the most popular or skilled or educated or rich? But that is not at all would God did. He chose to tell these Shepherds the greatest news that had ever been told. They were the first to know.

As the angels said, this news from God, this news that would bring great joy, would be for all people. This news is for YOU. I want you to really feel this personally this morning.

This week was a busy week for me. In ministry, Christmas and Easter I feel like are two of the busiest and can be most stressful time of the year. But this week on a couple of occasions I had to stop as I was preparing this sermon to remind myself that this message is for me. It is easy for me to jump to how I can teach it to you, but first I must remember it is a message for me.

This Good News that brings Peace that we are going to talk about this morning is for YOU. God has a message for you. We see all throughout Jesus' ministry that you don't have to have it all together to come to him. In fact, it is those who know they don't have it all together that come to him. The humble and the lowly. Just like a shepherd, humbly out in a field watching his sheep.

It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, what kind of lifestyle you live, how much money you have, how much of a sinner you think you are, how many times you mess up, however dirty and unworthy you feel. The Good News is for you.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

- Luke 2:11-12:

Today, not in the future, but today. The wait is finally over. The Savior has been born.

This is why Jesus was born. To save people. But from what?

In undergrad, I was a science major. I know total nerd, but what came with that a lot of science labs. In one particular lab, I had a girl named Katie as my partner. I remember one day Christianity came up and she mentioned how it was odd to her how people asked her if she was a Christian. She said that Christians often use the language of being “saved” and she wasn’t sure why. You see the idea of someone who was “saved” meant nothing to her, because she didn’t know what people needed to be saved from.

To understand why Jesus came as the Savior of the world, we first need to understand why we need a savior. What do we need to be saved from?

Matthew 1:21 makes it clear that Jesus was born to “save his people from their sins.” We all have a sin problem. This is a problem that we cannot make it go away. No matter how hard we try, we always have a sin problem. In fact, it never goes away and we are born with it.

Our only hope is that we are saved from our condition. The Good News is that Jesus has been born so that we can be saved from our sins. Our sin has caused us to be against God. We have rebelled against God. We have said no to a relationship with him due to our sin, and we now deserve punishment and the wrath of God for it. So how can we have peace?

We don’t like to talk about sin. We would prefer to just skip that part and go straight to the good. But the good news of the gospel is not good news unless we know the bad news first. We first have to know that we are sinners who have rebelled against a holy God. Then and only then do we understand that we need to be saved from our condition. That is when the RESULTS of the good news come in.

What is the result of the good news?

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

- Luke 2:14

Peace: This is our theme today for Advent. The angels say that peace is offered to those who God finds favor. So how do we find favor with God as sinners who have rebelled against him? We must receive the peace of God. As followers of Christ, we experience the peace of God in four different ways:

1. Peace with God

The peace offered to us with God is of first importance. It is foundational. As we have discussed, due to our sin our relationship with God is severed. In our sin, apart from Christ, Scripture describes our relationship with God as his enemies. There is anything but peace for those not in Christ as our sin must be punished. But because Jesus was born and ultimately died for us, he took on that punishment we deserve. We now have peace with God. All that punishment that we deserve because, yeah, we are the sinners, God removes if we put our faith and trust in Jesus as Savior, Messiah, and Lord. Do you realize that because of Jesus was born your peace with God allows you to be a part of his family?

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

- Galatians 4:4-5

Peace with God also allows us to have a relationship with Him, and not just any relationship. We can receive the most intimate relationship of all. We can be in the family of God!

“Forgiveness isn’t an end in itself. The point of forgiveness is to remove the barrier that stands between us and God so that He can give us His Spirit and bring us into His everlasting family.”

– Darrell Bock, Real Lost Gospel

Do you have peace with God? If you have not placed your faith in Jesus to be your savior and Lord of your life, then you are in opposition with God.

Notice the titles given to Jesus is the Good News proclaimed. Savior, Messiah, and Lord. Savior of our sins. Messiah, the anointed one. The Savior, who was promised in the Old Testament. And Lord. Jesus is Lord of all and to receive his peace we must give all of our lives to him.

But his peace is offered to you today. If you have placed your faith in Him and made Him Lord, then you are in God’s family. Praise God today that you are a son and daughter of the King of the Universe. With peace with God being on foundation, other forms of peace are made available to us on Jesus.

2. Peace within Ourselves

I think most often, this is the kind of peace people are referring when we mention we desire peace. We desire peace to fill our heart.

I believe it is the kind of peace that is mentioned in Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 4:6-7

Anxiety robs us of the peace that God offers us. Peace which goes beyond even our understanding. Instead of worrying and being anxious, we can choose to trust God and he gives rest to our worrying hearts. We can rest knowing that God is with us. He is in control of our lives. He is the one who brings us peace in the midst of difficulty and in the midst of good.

I am someone who really likes to worry. I love knowing that I can rest and trust in a God, who says he will never leave me, who comforts me, and who desires what is for my good.

What is robbing you of peace this Advent Season? During this Christmas season, many of us, if not all of us, are going through tough things, things that cause us anxiety and unrest. The stress of your job, the stress of performance, being overwhelmed by your sin, difficulty in relationships, family stresses, health issues, money, criticism, fear, loneliness, just deep and heavy burdens you are carrying that are weighing you down.

Give it to God. He can handle it. He desires for you to have peace this Christmas season that surpasses even your understanding. Give it to Him. Trust Him with it and live in peace. Do you, do we, believe we can give our anxieties to him?

I love what one commentator said when he said that "Crushing anxiety happens when I believe lies." When we are faced with anxiety and the worries of this world, we can choose to trust and believe God or believe the lies. With someone who struggles with worrying, I sometimes have to literally preach to myself and say that this worry is a lie and, by God's help, I choose not to believe it.

This is not always a quick fix, as it is sometimes a daily battle. But keep giving your burdens to God. He cares for you and offers you peace that is indescribable.

I remember as a little kid I would read these kid devotionals before bed. I remember one night I was reading on anxiety and worry, and even then, it was a struggle for me. The author gave an illustration that I absolutely loved. He said that as you go to bed tonight, take your worries, and ask God to hold on to them while you sleep. I remember that I would literally do that. I would

have a worry that would keep me up at night, and I would say “God, can you please hold on to this worry for me so I can get some sleep.” And then I would fall asleep.

This should be the practice of our lives. We don’t have to carry the burdens and anxieties and worries of this world with us. God wants us to come to him and give them to him. He can handle it! He created everything and owns everything, and controls everything. Give it to Him, trust Him, and experience His peace.

3. Peace with Others

As a result of our peace with God, we can then extend peace to others

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

- Romans 12:18

We spent some time on this in Acts as well as in Ephesians, but as much as we can, we are to live in peace in all of our relationships. As we receive peace with God that is made available to us through forgiveness of sins, we are then free to live at peace with others

During this Christmas season, don’t allow conflict to go unchecked. Reconcile and make peace with those God has placed in your life. The peace of God empowers us to strive to live in peace with others.

4. Peace in eternity

In the Middle East, there is great unrest and war going on.

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

Revelation 21:1-5

Complete, earthly, political peace will come one day. The unrest and violence in the middle east will subside. Jesus will come one more time to make all things right. And peace will be forevermore.

What Hope is this?! God’s peace is not temporary. It is forever. This is peace that is not just offered for the here and now, but for all of eternity.

I was talking to someone this week, and we were talking about the Peace of God. One thing he said that I loved was that our peace with God is not a cease fire. A cease fire is a temporary

cease of war. We have seen that happen, in the Middle East, between North and South Korea, and other places.

But our war is over, eternally over. The enemy has been defeated. Death will not defeat us. The punishment for our sin is gone forever, and we will reign with God forever in heaven.

What are we supposed to do with the good news?

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

- Luke 2:16-18

Once the shepherds had believed and experienced Jesus. They did what only is a natural result. They told people about Him. Telling people about Jesus was a natural flow of what they just believed and experienced.

My first semester in seminary I took evangelism. I remember being terrified as I knew I was going to be expected to go out of my comfort zone to proclaim the Peace of Jesus. I believe, if we are honest, all of us would say it can be a little intimidating. OK, everyone except Jim Higgins. I remember a quote that my professor said in that class that was extremely liberating. He said "If you want to talk more about Jesus with others, then fall more in love with him." Meaning, the more you love Jesus, the more you will talk about Him. This makes sense. We naturally talk about the things we love. We immerse ourselves in the things we love.

I love sports. I play sports, I spend time practicing sports. I read about sports. I watch sports. I listen to people on the radio talk about sports. I immerse myself in sports. And so, I love talking about it. I don't have to work hard at talking about sports. It just naturally flows out of me.

So, you want to learn to talk about Jesus more? Fall more in love with him. Spend time with him. Read his word. Spend time crying out to him and communing with him in prayer. Spend time with his people in community. Listen to podcast. Listen to worship music. Read books that stir your affections for Christ. Then that love for Jesus will naturally pour out of you into other parts of your life and conversations.

As we mentioned last week, outreach is going to be a big part of our focus in 2019. We have an amazing opportunity to reach this place for Christ. In a two-mile radius, our demographics are
41% White
33% African American
16% Hispanic or Latino
9% Other (Asian, American Indian, etc.)

And our ages are 0-34 (50%) and 35-65 and over (50%).

So, what we are going to do is we are going to. What we are going to challenge EACH OTHER to do, as I need to do better.

1. Immerse our community with the love of Christ. We want to be present in the community, serve the community, and love the community in the name of Jesus. I also believe that there is a second focus that we need to make on our outreach and that is...

We want to be “All In” in the places God has placed us. Sometimes we get this scary, overwhelming sense of what outreach looks like, and yes it can be hard, but we are going to challenge ourselves to use the places God already has us, in our neighborhoods, in our workplace, in our school, on our hobbies

How can we leverage those for the sake of the gospel! Ordinary people, living ordinary lives, with gospel intent. (Total Church)

We live in a world where we try to compartmentalized everything. This is work time, this is rest time, this is family time, church time, play time. But what if we didn't treat outreach that way? In fact, it is not supposed to be that way. As Christians, we are not called to say, this is my outreach time and then this is not. As we live our lives, with gospel intent, we are loving and serving others in the name of Jesus.

In that same evangelism class, we were asked to have several gospel centered conversations with people. One of the ways that we were encouraged to do this was by being a constant presence in particular places. I decided that since I shopped at Target I would try and use the same checkout person when I would go. As I did this, I would ask this person how they were doing and would even ask how I could pray for them. I was just building a relationship to show that I cared. I believe she was a single mom and she would talk about her child. One day she was nowhere to be found. She was no longer an employee. I was pretty disappointed as I had hoped to continue our relationship. One day I was at the pump of a gas station and I couldn't get my card to work. So, I went inside to the cash register and there she was. With excitement she said, “I know you! You were the guy who I talked to at Target!” She had remembered me after all this time. Just by getting to know her checking out at Target, asking her about herself, and asking how I could pray for her made a difference in her life. Maybe she just took that Christians cared, that was a win.

As Nicholas Ridley was being killed, a friend of his was being killed next to him. As they were about to die, his friend said to him, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

Their example to this day is a light burning for Christ. May our lives and our church be the same. May we live a life that burns brightly for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel that offers peace to us and the whole world.