

Christmas Brings Peace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 December 2020

Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] Well, what do you want for Christmas? And I don't mean jewellery, clothing, gadgets, perfume, massive TVs, PS5s, or any of that.

I mean, what do you long for more than anything else in life? For yourself, perhaps, or for your family, for your work situation, for our nation, for our world?

What is it that you long for? What would you love to see happen? Well, this unexpected year, the coronavirus, has forced us to think about what really matters in life, about what is most important. And so I wonder if you would agree with this Bowdoin advertising slogan, which is, if ever there was a year that needed Christmas, this is it.

If ever there was a year that needed Christmas, this is it. I don't actually shop in Bowdoin. It was a friend who told me that was their advertising. No offence if you do shop in Bowdoin. Lovely clothes, I'm sure.

[1 : 01] But the point is, what do we want from Christmas? What do we need from Christmas? What is it that we need? Well, if the sentiments of Christmas cards are anything to go by, then we long for peace.

And I don't just mean the sentiment on religious Christmas cards either, because they'll normally say peace on earth. But all the other Christmas cards will usually have the word peace emblazoned across the front, most often with a robin or whatever they've got to do with Christmas.

I have no idea. But usually, I've done the Google research just so you don't have to, but most Christmas cards have the word peace on them. And so whether you're here this evening and you call yourself a Christian, or you might call yourself a secular person, or you're just not really sure what you believe and you're investigating, then I'm sure we would all agree that what we want and what we need is peace on earth.

Now, this past week, it was the 40th anniversary of John Lennon's death. And you know that John Lennon and the Beatles sang the song Imagine. And so in 1971, John Lennon was singing Imagine All the People Living Life in Peace.

And he dreamt that someday the world would live as one, with no heaven, no hell, no countries, no possessions, no greed or hunger, and no religion too.

[2 : 27] Now, you may say that he was a dreamer, and he's not the only one. And yet, peace that John Lennon sang about, peace that is on the Christmas cards, peace is central to the message of Christmas.

Jesus Christ was born to bring peace. And I wonder if you caught that from that last reading we had from Luke chapter 2. It comes as part of a song, the song of the angels, that goes, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.

The song is sometimes given its Latin title, Gloria in excelsis Deo. And it just means glory to God in the highest. And so Luke tells us the story of Jesus' birth by recording some songs for us.

And these are the original, and they're the best, Christmas songs. So Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke, one of the four biographies of Jesus' life, he pulls together a Christmas playlist of songs.

And this song, the song sung by the angels, proclaims peace on earth. And so I'd just like us to think about this evening and the time we have, to think about how Christmas brings peace.

[3 : 43] Because unlike the soppy and sentimental talk that we hear about peace at this time of year, the angels' song offers real and true and lasting peace.

Peace way beyond our expectations, even if it doesn't fit with our expectations. So I'd like us just to think about two simple points. First of all, Jesus brings peace that doesn't fit our expectations.

And secondly, Jesus brings peace that goes beyond our expectations. It's a peace that doesn't fit our expectations, but it's a peace that goes beyond our expectations.

So first of all, Jesus brings peace that doesn't fit our expectations. And we see this in the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth. So an angel gives some shepherds his birth announcement, which is followed by an army of angels appearing in a blaze of glory in the night sky.

And they express their joy at the coming of Jesus by singing glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.

[4 : 53] And so their praise goes in two directions. They declare glory to God in the highest heaven and they declare peace to people on earth.

And so firstly and fundamentally, Christmas is about God. Life, the world, all revolves around God. And so if we are going to know the peace of Christmas, then it can't be somehow disconnected from God. In other words, we're only going to understand peace.

We're only going to experience peace in our lives in relation to God. And so the peace that Jesus brings isn't primarily peace out there in the world.

And nor is it peace in here, in our hearts or in our lives. Because the angels aren't singing about world peace, about international or national or political peace between people.

[5 : 54] Because there are wars across our globe, there are civil wars in different countries across the world, and there are political divisions in this nation. We just need to look at the state of the UK to know that we don't have peace.

And Jesus did not appear on that first Christmas to bring inner peace. He did not come to bring that psychological or internal peace in our lives where we just feel good about ourselves all the time. Because there is hurt, there is pain, there is anxiety, and there is depression across the world and in our lives. And we just need to look at the impact of COVID on mental health in the UK to see that there is no peace.

So Jesus didn't appear on that first Christmas to bring inner peace. So he didn't appear to bring peace out there. It will come, but not yet.

And he didn't appear to bring peace in here. It will come, but not yet. So what is the peace that Jesus brings? Well, the peace is peace with God.

[7 : 03] The Bible talks in terms of us being separated from God, of us being alienated from God, of us being enemies of God. And that's why we all need peace with God.

And so the true message of Christmas will always wash over us unless we realise this. And that's why the peace that Jesus brings doesn't fit our expectations.

Because whether we are aware of it or not, we are at war with our loving creator God. As human beings, we have rebelled against him.

We have made ourselves his enemies by rejecting his rightful rule and authority over our lives. And we've made ourselves our own kings and rulers and bosses. And so when the angels sang out, glory to God in the highest heaven, what we cry out from our hearts is glory to me.

I want to be at the centre of the universe. I want to get the praise and adulation. I want to look good. I want to live my way.

[8 : 10] I want to do what I want to do. And so God doesn't get a look in. And so we cancel God from our lives and we try to live without him. And so I might defiantly reject God and want nothing to do with him.

Or I may be too busy to pay him much attention. Or perhaps I might just ignore God, thinking he is completely irrelevant to my life.

And the Bible calls this sin because it alienates us from God. And so the peace that Jesus came to bring is reconciliation between God and us.

He came to fill this gap between God and us that is sin. In a sense, we're a bit like the little boy who was desperate to play Joseph in his school nativity play.

But instead of being given the part of Joseph by his teacher, he was given the more minor role, shall we say, of the innkeeper. And the boy was hurt. And so he looked for an opportunity to take his revenge.

[9 : 16] And he got the opportunity on the night of the school performance. And so the school assembly hall was packed full with stressed teachers and with proud parents. And then when Mary and Joseph approached the innkeeper to deliver their familiar line, is there any room at the inn?

Instead of saying no, like he was supposed to say, the boy seized his opportunity to steal the show. And so with a big smile on his face, when he was asked the question, is there any room? He said, yes, there is plenty of room. Why don't you come in and make yourselves at home? Mary and Joseph didn't know what to do. And the play descended into absolute chaos. And, you know, there is something of that little boy in all of us when it comes to God. So if all the world's a stage, as Shakespeare once said, then God is the creator. God is the writer, the designer of the set. And God is the producer. Which means our role is to live as he designed, which means recognizing his authority over our lives, and then following his instructions.

[10 : 28] And yet we're not happy with the role that God has given us. And so we rip up his script, we write our own lines, and we push him aside so that we can take center stage and get all the glory for ourselves.

And that's why the Bible tells us we are not at peace with God. Our sin separates us from him. And because God is holy and God is just, he can't just ignore sin as if it didn't matter. It deserves to be punished. And yet because God is loving and good and kind and gracious and merciful and forgiving, God is a way of punishing our sin without punishing us, so that we can have peace with him.

And so that's our first point. Jesus brings peace that doesn't fit our expectations. It's peace with God. And secondly, Jesus brings peace that goes way beyond our expectations. And we see this in the angel's birth announcement. Remember what the angel said to the shepherds. We read in Luke chapter 2, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

[11 : 41] 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.

Okay, so we are not at peace with God. There's a gulf between us because of our sin. But the angel's message is good news of great joy for all people. Because a Savior has been born. He is the Messiah, the Lord. So Savior expresses Jesus' mission. Jesus came to save.

The Messiah expresses his title. So Jesus is God's chosen king. And then the Lord expresses his identity.

Jesus is God. And so all of this emphasizes how Jesus is the perfect mediator, the perfect go-between to bring peace between God and us.

[12 : 42] Because there is no way that you or I could make peace with God by ourselves. But God has come to us in the person of Jesus.

And it's way beyond our expectations because it's quite literally out of this world. God left the glory of heaven to be born as a tiny baby to then lie in a manger.

C.S. Lewis captures this well when he said, A stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world. And so despite the fact that we are the ones who have wronged God, God holds out the hand of peace, as it were, and offers it to us at great cost to himself.

Now the famous theologian Arsene Wenger helps us understand this. He was also the manager of Arsenal Football Club for part of his career. But this is what Arsene Wenger said.

He said, Where you are at Christmas might be important, but it's where you are at Easter that really counts. Now, I'm pretty sure he wasn't talking about Jesus when he said that.

[13 : 54] But he reminds us not just to look at the cradle where Jesus was born, but to look at the cross where Jesus died. Because that's what makes peace with God possible.

Jesus is the perfect saviour because he is God, the Lord, and only God can forgive sins. So it needs God to do it.

And Jesus was also man. He was the Messiah. And he became a man in order so that he could die on a cross, because only humans can die.

And death is the punishment for sin. So by taking on human nature, while still being God, Jesus was able to pay the price for our sins when he was nailed to a cross.

And that's how we can enjoy peace with God. One of our earlier readings, Romans chapter 5, says this, So real and true and lasting peace exceeds our expectations because it comes to us at the costly death of Jesus.

[15:13] Charles Wesley's classic Christmas carol, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, expresses this really well in its second line, Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.

And so Christianity is about God stepping onto the stage of human history in the person of Jesus, of God revealing himself to us so that we can enjoy the relationship with him that we were created for. And so instead of, from afar, looking down at this world with all its sin and evil and suffering and pain, God has entered into this world to sort out all our mess.

He was willing to pay the price for the damage that we have caused. And so rather than banish us from his presence forever, like we deserve, God offers us peace.

And accepting his peace now means that we will share in his glory forevermore. And that's how it's a peace that Jesus brings that goes beyond our expectations.

[16:26] And the last words of the angel song emphasize this further because they say peace comes to those on whom his favor rests. So peace comes to us, not because we deserve it, not because we can earn it, but because God graciously gives it to us.

He extends it to us as undeserving as we are. Now, sadly, I think so many people get God wrong. They imagine him to be some great big Father Christmas in the sky, a big Santa Claus who's always checking on us to see if we've been good for his list of who's naughty and who's nice.

And yet God is not some glorified Santa Claus whose favor we must try to earn or who rewards us on the basis of whether we have been good or not. No, Christmas tells us that we have all messed up and spoiled our relationship with God.

And yet God has drawn near to us in Jesus. Remember the angel's birth announcement, to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord.

To you, the angel said, to the shepherds, to you a Savior has been born. But those same words, to you, are for you and they're for me because we too need this Savior, need this mediator who will reconcile us to the God who made us.

[18:00] And yet the tragedy is that so many who hear the message of Christmas will never receive it and will just turn their backs on the peace that God offers. So just as I wrap this talk up, Jesus brings us peace that doesn't fit our expectations, but it's a peace that goes beyond our expectations.

And so how can we have this peace for ourselves? Well, it's as easy as A, B, C. Admit, believe, and confess.

We need to admit that we are not at peace with God and we need to believe that God has come to us to save us in Jesus. And we need to confess our sin and turn away from our old way of life towards God.

That's making peace with God. Do you have it? It can be yours today if you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior.

And if you do, then you can join the choir of angels and sing glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

[19:17] So going on, by the stars and slash and on the hymnings as you ask, as you can join and help you or just put the ■ lider as you go to a stadium and if you do, then you will over came to the choir Sundered until your spouse and you will there and fill the choir second that is our family that you and