

Peace On Earth

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[0 : 00] Well, I don't know about you, but I think Christmas time is the worst time of year to be thinking about peace. Because you've all experienced what it's like leading up to Christmas. The chaos begins.

If you're still working, you're in reports. Ah, and you're working, working, working, you're in deadlines. Yes, you're going to go on holiday, but boy, you've got to work hard at getting all those deadlines in. Dinner dates, making food, taking food.

The crash and the queue at the shops. Stress levels rising as you begin realizing, oh, I've got to spend time with those family members that I haven't seen for a while. Hmm, wonder how that's going to go.

And then you go crazy, the greatest irony of all, trying to, you get totally stressed out by trying to organize the holiday so that you don't have to be stressed. Trying to find that little elusive bit of peace.

Peace is a prized commodity, and yet it seems in such short supply. But it's associated with Christmas in a very special way.

[1 : 04] So why is that? What is special about Christmas that connects peace with this time of year? And how can we access that peace in our daily lives, especially at this run-up to Christmastime?

And then how can we practice that peace in our daily lives as well? Well, one of the reasons peace is highlighted at Christmastime is that it's highlighted in the Christmas narratives, the stories of Jesus' birth.

So have a look, turn with me in our look at the New Testament reading, really. But we're in the Gospel of Luke, so just have Luke 1 and 2 open before us.

And you'll see that this word peace is very much associated with what Jesus came to achieve. In fact, it's used three times in the birth narratives, the birth stories of Luke chapter 1 and chapter 2. In Luke chapter 1, verse 79, at the end of chapter 1, in what's known as the Benedictus, it's Zacharias' prayer of praise, thanking God for his son, who's going to lead the way for Jesus.

[2 : 12] And it ends with saying that Jesus is going to come to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet in the way of peace.

In the way of peace, that means it's going to heal. Jesus has come to give light, so we've been singing about that. It's one of the Advent themes of Christ coming into this dark world to give light. But what does the light do? Well, it gives us peace inwardly so that we can walk a peaceful life. In our text in Luke chapter 2, when the angels arrive, a bunch of shepherds are doing their thing, and these angels arrive, glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased, or on whom his favor rests, or peace on earth to good men, goodwill to all men on earth. That's Luke chapter 4. And then Luke chapter 2, sorry, Luke chapter 2 verse 14. And then just further on in Luke chapter 2, we've got Simeon, who acts as a kind of prophet.

He's an old man. He's been waiting decades for what he calls the consolation and redemption of Israel. And then Holy Spirit prompts him to go to the temple, and then Mary and Joseph are there.

[3 : 33] I think it's on the eighth day when they're going to present Christ to be circumcised, and he sees this baby. And he says this, Lord, you are now letting your servant depart in peace.

Luke chapter 2 verse 29, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, that you've prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

So he gets to go in peace, because his eyes have seen the salvation that God is going to achieve. Not just for his people, but for Gentiles as well, for the rest of the world.

And so peace is central to the story of the coming of Christ into the world. Essentially, where Jesus is, peace is going to follow. It forms a central part of what he came to earth to achieve.

It's part of Jesus' program of change. It was prophesied that this one coming is going to bring peace on earth. To understand why and how peace forms part of God's plan to change the world, and why it involves Jesus as the Messiah, we've got to do a bit of digging in the Old Testament.

[4 : 45] So let's just give us a little bit of an Old Testament background to this word, peace. Now when we think of peace, we mainly think of the lack of hostility between countries, or maybe more on a personal level.

I've got peace with so-and-so, we're not fighting with each other at the moment. But the Old Testament word for peace, I'm sure you'll remember it, is shalom. Shalom. It's a much more bigger, fuller, much more three-dimensional type of word than our version of what we normally think of as peace.

In fact, it's used of things that we would not normally associate with the word peace. For example, it's used of the price to pay back the owner of stolen livestock. So in Exodus 22, verse 4, if a stolen beast is found alive in the person's possession who took it, he shall pay back double to the person he took it from.

That word pay double is shalom. He will shalom him. There's a shalom price. There's a peace price that he's got to pay. Joshua makes an altar to the Lord, and it's made of shalom stones.

Stones that are uncut and fit perfectly into place. Joshua 8, verse 30 says, At that time, Joshua built an altar to the Lord, an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool.

[6 : 10] And that word uncut is the word shalom. It's made of shalom stones. Stones that fit well into place. And then Solomon brings shalom to the temple when he completes it and begins the sacrifices that God wants.

So in 1 Kings 9, verse 25, and you don't have to turn there. I've got them up on the screen. I hope you can see that. But nevertheless, maybe just jotting it down. 1 Kings 9, verse 25, Solomon used to offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar that he built to the Lord.

And so he finished the house. He completed the house, the temple. And the word for finish or complete is shalom. Solomon shalomed the temple when the sacrifices started.

So shalom price is meant to restore broken relationship. Shalom stones fit into place and complete the thing without needing any changes made to them.

The temple is a place of shalom when it starts operating as it was designed to do, to make payment for sin and to restore relationships between God and his people, but also between people and people.

[7 : 18] That's the shalom price. In fact, there's a whole range of Old Testament sacrifices called the peace or freewill offerings that are all the verb behind that or the noun behind that is shalom. They are shalom offerings to make peace between people.

So it's actually a word that describes a profound reality where everything in God's world, everything and everyone is working in peace and harmony with each other.

It's like a multifaceted reality that we live in. We all got relationships with many different things and people in our world, and you want shalom or peace between all of them.

It refers to a world where everything is working as it should, especially with things that are broken or restored, are restored to a state of wholeness and completeness and in good working order.

It's a world where everything is working as it should, where things that were broken or destroyed or torn or hindered are restored to a state of wholeness and completeness and in good working order.

[8 : 26] Think of it like the engine in your car. When your piston rod is broken, so that's the thing that makes the car go, I believe, I've been told. It's deep in the engine there somewhere.

Just guys, I mean ladies, just trust me on this one. Sorry. So it's the thing that makes the car go. Okay, when that's broken, the car don't go. It breaks the shalom of your car because your wheels don't turn if the engine isn't working.

And then when you're driving and that happens, it breaks the peace of your heart. Your heart stops working properly. Your anxiety levels go up. Your shalom is upset. And especially the shalom of your wallet when you've got to take it to the mechanic, although you've made him happy.

And then when you get home, your relationships at home suffer because now you're anxious, you're worried, it's Christmas time, and you've got to fork out. You know what it costs to fix a car

these days. And there go the Christmas presents.

Fixing the car will make it complete. It will work. It will be whole. And it will restore peace. In Hebrew thought, if your car is broken and you fix it, you've shalomed your car.

[9 : 38] Does that make sense? Okay. Now next time you go to the mechanic, just say, listen, I want to make peace with my car. Can you make peace with my car for me? So, peace is what's needed in order to restore God's world to working order again.

Because, I don't know your experience of God's world, mine is peace is hard to come by. You can have it, but it's not easy. The opposite happens much more naturally, doesn't it?

Chaos. Things that break. Even your own loving relationships at home of your partner, the one person on planet Earth that you love more than anything. You're going to fight with them.

And they're going to fight with you. And it's hard to make peace with them. Peace is what's needed in order to restore God's world to working order again. And God intended for his people to be bringers of peace.

to restore God's world back to order again in the Old Testament. But, man, they failed miserably. You've journeyed with us as we journey through Exodus at the very start of their working relationship with God.

[10 : 46] No, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. No peace. Fighting. Discord. And it just gets worse and worse in the Old Testament. So that's why by the time of, let's say, for example, Isaiah the prophet, 700 years?

B.C.? 200 years before Jerusalem gets taken out? Just before the northern tribes get taken out because they're not bringing peace. They're fighting with everyone? Isaiah chapter 9.

If you've got it, you might want to open it. I'll probably have it on the screen. But you might not see it because of all the lights. But maybe then your Bibles will help. That's why you've got prophecies like Isaiah chapter 9 that looks forward to a king, a person that God is going to send that is going to bring the peace that God needs for his people to have so that his people can be peace bringers in the world.

So Isaiah chapter 9, verse 5, notice this thing of picture of peace. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning and will be fuel for the fire.

The time when the Messiah arrives. It's a picture of peace. How can there be this peace where people who are fighting with each other, the instruments they use for hurting each other is destroyed?

[12 : 09] How? Well, that little word for in verse 6 is important. For, to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders.

He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. And of the greatness of his government and of his peace, there will be no end.

he's going to bring a rule, a world rule, that will bring peace to earth. Wouldn't that make you a powerful king?

I mean, we give Nobel Peace Prizes to those who manage to make great peace arrangements in our world, don't we? Well, here's one who's going to bring the Nobel Prize of all Nobel Prizes.

Well, who is it? Who is this person that's going to do this? Well, you keep reading. This person is going to reign on David's throne and over his kingdom. And he's going to establish and uphold it with justice and righteousness forever and ever.

[13 : 26] So, the Old Testament is waiting for someone in the line of David, i.e. the king of the Jews. The shorthand for that is Messiah.

We're waiting for him to arrive. And then you can fast forward to our birth narratives, the birth stories of Jesus. And they're all saying the same thing. This little baby, born to this couple who no one knows about, but who happens to be in the line of David, David, is the Messiah.

He's the one that's going to bring peace to earth. That makes him the most important person in world history, does it not? it should make him the most important person in your life.

Well, that's the Old Testament background to the New Testament now. That promise of peace was a treasured and important part of what's known as the Messianic promise. The promise of the Old Testament that the Messiah would come and right all the wrongs of the world.

To this day, one of the main reasons the majority of Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah is that they say there is still no world peace. They look around and say, well, where is this? Especially for us Jews.

[14 : 41] Of course, for them, it consists mainly of international political peace treaties between nations. They've got no concept that the main part, the foremost part of this peace is between God and his people.

And they're not aware that they're fighting with their own God because they've rejected the one that he sent. to connect them back to him. That is the peace that is needed.

And that's why Jesus had to come. Peace between God and man is the fountainhead, the principle, the starting point though. It's not the end point.

It's the starting point for peace from which all other peaceful relationships have their origin. In Luke chapter 1, we see why they needed this peace and we see why people to this day still need it.

In the prophecy regarding John the Baptist who was sent to prepare God's people for the Messiah, in Luke chapter 1 verse 16, we see this. John the Baptist went ahead of Christ to prepare his people for him, to receive him well.

[15 : 55] Why? Why couldn't he just arrive and say, hey everyone, I'm here, and then they all would rush to him. Well, there's a problem that has to be fixed. Here's the problem.

Luke chapter 1 verse 16, this is John the Baptist, he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will return many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

So that's why it's called John the Baptist because he baptized, but what does baptism represent? What did he call people to do? Repent. Jewish people that have the Lord as their Lord, as God as their Lord, still they had to turn to God and repent of all the nonsense they were doing in their lives.

He will turn many of the children of Israel back to the Lord their God and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah that's as a mighty prophet.

Now notice, to turn the hearts of their fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready for the Lord a people that are prepared to receive him.

[17 : 10] The Messiah came to have a people that have turned back to God and turned back to each other and prepared as a nation or really what that means is prepared for action.

Notice they'll turn to God but they're also going to turn to each other. In particular, family relationships are going to be fixed and won't that be a blessing at Christmas time if you can spend time with your family with peaceful, happy, joyful, whole relationships.

Well, you can if you've come to Christ. Now when they do this, if they turn back to God and their hearts are turned back towards each other, they will become a people prepared.

That's an interesting word. It's referring to making a ship ready, a ship ready to sail by having all the things in place and in working order. You know, we talk about having things squared away or ship shape.

ship shape. God makes us ship shape. We become useful to Him. We become a working, a good working part of this world, not a broken piston like in the car.

[18 : 31] We become helpful and useful when we receive His peace. When His peace enters our lives and our hearts and we turn to Him in repentance and faith and receive Jesus as our Lord, as our King.

So how does your life look on a daily basis? If you were a ship, how peacefully prepared are you to face the different situations in life? Because life is going to throw things at you.

There's not plain sailing in life. There's rocks. There's storms. And if you don't have the peace of God, if your ship isn't ready to sail and to make your way through this life, you're going to get shipwrecked.

And what's worse, I don't know if it is worse, but you're going to shipwreck others.

You're going to bash into other ships. Are your ropes and jigs and pulleys all in working order? Are they neatly packed away, ready for action? It's a ship of peace.

You've got to be, that's what prepares you for action. When the bad things come, you can't now start untangling the problems in your life. That's going to be a problem for you.

[19 : 37] You're going to steam right into it while you're still trying to undo the knots. Is your life full of knots that are so tight and complicated you just can't get them undone? If so, then at this Christmas time, let Christ give you his peace and you'll find that those knots begin, are loosened enough for you to begin to tackle them, maybe one by one, and unthread those knots and your life can begin to take on fresh purpose and direction.

But we've got to answer the question, how exactly did Jesus achieve the peace that the world so badly needs? How did Jesus achieve this peace? Was it just by coming into the world?

Well, that's part of it, because he showed us, he told us how to live our life. But his example, and his words are not enough. It's his death that brings us peace.

peace. We celebrate his coming at Christmas time. It's almost a promise of peace. He achieves it when we celebrate another thing in the church's calendar, Easter.

Although, what's coming is hinted at in his birth narratives in Luke. In Luke chapter 2, while Simeon is praising God for this child that's going to bring peace, he's going to notice that this peace that's coming is going to come at a price.

[21 : 05] It's going to come at the cost of chaos and pain and death. Luke chapter 2, verse 34, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed.

He's going to bring peace, but there's going to be upheaval while he does so. And Simeon, probably looking directly at Mary, and a sword will pierce through your own soul too, so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

The sword here stands for violence, for death, for bloodshed. A reference to the ultimate price paid by Christ to procure peace for his kingdom.

Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, wants them to know just what it took for Jesus to purchase the peace that we enjoy with God and to spur the church on to pursue peace with our fellow man. I should have it up on the screen, Ephesians chapter 2. He himself is our peace, who has made the two groups talking about Jews and Gentiles, one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.

[22 : 29] And in one body, both together, to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death all hostility.

His death, that's how incredibly powerful Jesus is, and how incredibly powerful his death is. By dying, he reconciles people with each other and people to God.

It's an incredibly powerful thing. When we die, absolutely nothing happens like that. Maybe, if you weren't a nice person, you give peace to the people in your life, which is a horrible thought, isn't it? Imagine living such a bad life, the people are happy that you died. Jesus makes peace between God and men by paying the shalom price, the fellowship price himself.

He is the peace offering that we can't pay, but it's paid on our behalf to reconcile us to God, and then begins the process of reconciliation where we can be those peacemakers that God wants us to be.

[23 : 42] So, last few minutes, how can we be peacemakers this Christmas? The peace between humans is an important part of Jesus' peacemaking project.

So, peace between humans is an important part of Jesus' peacemaking project. It's one way of looking at what Christ came to do. Yes, to die for our sins, but what does that do?

It gives you peace with God, gives you peace in your own mind, gives you peace with your past, and gives you the ability to have peace with others in the here and now. That's why Jesus says, he starts his famous sermon on the mount with the beatitudes, blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are people who make peace. You've actually got to do something here. And when you do, you are going to receive blessing from God, from others, and God himself and the angels and Christ will call you a true son of God, a true daughter of God when you do that.

So where can you start making peace this Christmas? Where can you start? Well, back to those family gatherings we were speaking of at the start. If you've got family members that you're struggling with, let's be nice, or estranged from, or just you've got a full-on, a full-blown argy-bargy.

[25 : 21] You can't go see them, it's going to be a nightmare. Full open wall. But know this, peace is achievable for you if you've come to Christ.

And you're tasked with being a peacemaker in your family. maybe you need to eat some humble pie. And ask them for forgiveness for stuff you've done.

So then do it. Christmas time, do it. If you know that there's problems, and you know that you've caused it, or even if you're not fully to blame, Jesus was innocent.

He came to die for you. So don't stand on your high horse and go, eat some humble pie, act like Christ, and say, listen, I just want to let you know, I'm sorry for the words I said.

Maybe they'll accept you, maybe they won't, maybe they'll throw it back in your face. So what?

Christ came to die so that you can have peace and offer it. Trust Christ and let them throw their toys

out the cot.

[26 : 34] Maybe you need to eat some humble pie and ask forgiveness for being, I don't know, an absent dad, or an over-anxious mom, or an unattentive partner, or an abusive one.

Anyway, this can take hard work. Peace isn't easy. Christ's death shows us that peace comes at a price. But what you want to do in any situation, you don't want to escalate it when there's tension. You want to de-escalate. So in the evenings, join us as we look through proverbs. There's very helpful stuff that we're doing, just very practical, everyday stuff. And it's hard.

Practical everyday stuff is not easy. Anyway, one of the proverbs we started with was, a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. So you want to de-escalate, not escalate any situation this coming Christmas.

So don't replay harsh words with harsh words. Replay harsh words with gentle words. What better way to start your Christmas time with your family than calling up members, friends, family that you've done stuff with, that you've wronged, and ask for forgiveness.

[27 : 52] What about ringing them up and offering them forgiveness? Christmas? Hey, I know things have been tough. You know, these things that you did were really hard for me.

I didn't enjoy it. But I just want you to know that I forgive you, and it would be lovely if we can have Christmas together. That can change someone's life.

Do that, and you'll begin to fulfill the hope for which God sent Christ to the world. peace on earth, and good will to men on whom his favor rests. Shall we ask God to help him do this for us?

Heavenly Father, we are so thankful for the reminder of this time of year, for the sending of Christ into the world, who began this great project of peace.

Lord, thank you that we can have peace with you through Christ. We are so mindful that it costs such a huge sacrifice. We can only receive it with thanks, but Lord, you want us to return that into the world by being peacemakers ourselves.

[29 : 05] That's hard work, Lord. And we need your Holy Spirit, we need your power, and we need your strength and wisdom to be able to do that well. Father, will you make this Christmas time a time of peace for us in our hearts and minds?

forgive us our sins, reconcile us to you, and then, Lord, help us to bring peace to our friends and family as best as we can.

In Jesus' name, Amen.