

Title: The Promise - Peace  
Date: December 5, 2021  
Subject: The shepherds show we can have peace through the Christ of Christmas.  
Scripture: Luke 2:8–14; Isaiah 9:6–7; Romans 8:6–7

A week ago Saturday, I wasn't exactly experiencing peace. It was the afternoon and I was finishing preparing the Sunday School lesson. At least, that's what I thought. I noticed the paging seemed to be short of what I'd anticipated. I scrolled down and what I thought was there, what I wanted to be there, what I needed to be there...was gone. I got upset because of the time and effort that had been put in and wanting to get done so I could move on to other necessary things.

The notes I'd used had been thrown away and were gone in the trash. I was fussing and fuming, being a crabby-appleton. I thought I might be able to recover the material if I hit the back function to see if I'd accidentally erased it. I hit back back back back back back til I wore out my finger. It wasn't there. The computer ate my Sunday School lesson. More agitation and complaining. Words of Christmas songs came to mind. I'd like to say I immediately experienced peace and serenity. No! I shoved them aside. I didn't want peace. I wanted the lesson. I had to try to remember what was missing and redo that part. Peace eventually came when I allowed God into the equation. He had a different kind of lesson for me to learn.

Christmas season is promoted as a time of peace...peace on earth and among people. Often people experience the opposite. There's the raucous crowds of early bird shoppers, the agitation of waiting in line, impatience, pushiness, anger, frustration. People want peace.

It's like the mom who had a hectic day. She was frazzled. What put it over the top was her twin junior high boys, Bill and Will, who were goofing off around the Christmas tree. Mom explained that they were too loud and rambunctious. They were driving her crazy. She told them she needed some peace and quiet. "Can you give me some peace and quiet?" Bill sweetly said, "Sure mom. I'll be quiet." Will chimed in, "I'll be peace."

Peace is an integral part of the Christmas story, and more particularly, lived out in the shepherds.

We're in Luke 2:8 - 14. READ.

The shepherds had been experiencing a measure of peace. After all, there were out in an idyllic pastoral setting. Just them, their sheep baa-ing away and the stars shining like diamonds in the night sky. They were far from the hustle and bustle of the big city. And they were living in an era known as the "Roman Peace." No enemy attacking their land. Nobody bugging them because they were shepherds, considered to be the underclass of society. At least not too much, as long as they stayed in their place.

One night as they were minding their own business, their peace was obliterated. An angel of the Lord appeared and brought with him so much glory it didn't only surround the angel but enveloped the shepherds as well. Suddenly, they were in heaven's spotlight and the brightness spooked them. They were terrified. Their knees were knocking. They tried to speak but couldn't get words out. Their eyes were locked in a wide open

stare. It felt as if their hearts would pound their way out of their chests. The reason -- angels didn't show up all the time, and when they did, it usually wasn't a good thing. The shepherds were afraid for their lives.

The angel told them they didn't need to be afraid. He he'd brought them good news about the Savior, Christ the Lord, who'd been born and was lying in a manger. Then the angel's backup group chimed in. It wasn't just a duo or trio or quartet, but a great company. Think thousands. These angels spoke, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace. . . to men on whom his favor rests...with whom he is pleased." The angels proclaimed this good news because the Prince of Peace had come (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

When the angels left, the shepherds snapped out of their dazed shock and awe. They hurried into Bethlehem to see for themselves and found it exactly as the angels had told them. Would they have expected anything less? If you can't trust an angel, who can you trust?

They returned to the flocks with peace, a loud and joyous peace. They might have been guilty of disturbing the peace as they let everyone they met know about the child who was born that night, that he was the Savior, Christ the Lord. Everyone was amazed.

What would you think if the shepherds, after hearing the angels proclaim the Savior had been born and going to the manger to see Jesus, had concluded, "I thought he'd be bigger. How can somebody so itsy bitsy save us, let alone the whole world? He's the Christ? He didn't even wiggle his nose to turn a mouse into a dove. It wasn't all that fantastic." And then they went back to their peaceful little hillsides with their peaceful little sheepies. They didn't do that. Instead, they opted for peace of their souls.

Joel Smallbone of For King And Country in *A Christmas Monologue*, "It's remarkable, To think that a baby boy born in a stable, No prestige, no privilege. No social media or social status, Political campaigns or private airplanes, And yet, He turned BC into AD. He flipped the world on its head. He's the most famous name around the globe. Inspired the most read book ever written. He reconnected us to Heaven and, in turn, brought Heaven down to Earth. And now, He offers us redemption, A fresh start. Freedom. So that we can hold our heads high and march through this life knowing that we are never alone. That every woman and man, boy and girl, To all of us who feel like we have nothing left, Nothing to bring, We can know that God is smiling at us, That He's loving us" (*A Christmas Monologue*, Joel Smallbone of For King And Country).

The angels promised peace. What is it? Peace is the opposite of fear and agitation. It speaks of wholeness, total well-being, inner rest and quietness. It's an absence of war and hostilities between God and people who've come into a right relationship with him. Peace with God is ours because his favor rests on those who've accepted his gift of salvation, on us.

This is made possible because of the work of the Prince of Peace. He ended the war between God and people because he's the Peacemaker who gave his life. Jesus spoke of the peace he offers. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). Peace is contrasted with hearts that are troubled and afraid.

Jesus doesn't give peace the way the world gives stuff. The world makes all sorts of promises it can't keep and never intends to keep. Jesus keeps his promises. The world sends people on wild goose chases as they seek peace. The methods it advises are meditation, exercise, false religions, drugs, alcohol. I just finished Johnny Cash's autobiography. He detailed how he sought peace and an escape from the difficulties of touring, dealing with life, and relationship problems through popping pills, massive quantities. He said they provided temporary relief but there was always a crash and he needed to take more to try to achieve the same altered state. He took so many he almost died several times. He ultimately found peace in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus also said, "I have told you these things (about his arrest, death, resurrection, provision of sending the Holy Spirit to his followers), so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Alexander MacLaren pictures being in the world like "living upon a volcano's side... unless the roots of your being are fixed in a God who is your friend" (MacLaren's Exposition on Philippians 4:7). Peace is often exhibited in the middle of a storm, when life unleashes its fury, the devil is snarling, when we face trials, hardships, sacrifices, and difficulties. It's at those times that we can truly sing "it is well with my soul."

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be in us. As we submit our minds to him, allow him to be in control, we'll experience peace (Romans 8:6, 7). When we think God's thoughts after him – whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy - he promises to be with us (Philippians 4:8, 9). The God of peace will be with us.

Another Scripture on peace emphasizes this. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace" (Colossians 3:15). Peace is to rule. It's the umpire who calls balls and strikes. It desires to rule out anger, envy, bitterness, quarrelsomeness, anxiety, conceit, etc. We're to submit to the Lord's rule in our lives. This instruction is in the context of how we're to get along with other members of the body of Christ. We're to be at peace with one another.

As someone has said, "Here are the beauty and the dark side of the holidays. It is during this time of year the good of life and the bad of life are both exaggerated. In no other time of the year are we more aware of the problems we can't solve, the people we can't control, and the expectations we can't meet. There are problems that are decades in the making that you won't be able to fix overnight. There are people in your life whom you won't be able to save during the holidays, and there are expectations that you will try so hard to meet for someone else in your family and you will never be able to do it. There is a difference in being hopeful FOR something and being hopeful IN something. Choose this year to face your deep longing and come to believe that there is one specific source from whom you can derive peace—and that is Jesus Christ."

In 1994, two Americans were invited by the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics from the perspective of their faith. One place they taught was a large orphanage. There were about 100 boys and girls, children who'd been abandoned, abused and left in the care of a government-run program. When the holiday season approached, it was the first time the orphans heard the Bible's story of Christmas.

One of the Americans referred to himself as Will Fish. He recalls, "We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger. Throughout the story, the children and orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word.

"Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins...the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from tan felt we'd brought from the United States.

"The orphans were busy assembling their mangers as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat - he looked to be about 6 years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger. I called for the translator to ask the boy why there were two babies in the manger.

"Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at his completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously. For such a young boy, who had heard the Christmas story only once, he related the happenings accurately - until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger.

"Then Misha started to ad lib. He made up his own ending to the story, 'And when Mary laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I couldn't, because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift. So I asked Jesus, "If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?" And Jesus told me, "If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me." So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and he told me I could stay with him - for always.'

"As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon nor abuse him, someone who would stay with him - for always."

He was at peace because of Jesus – The Savior, The Christ, Immanuel who is “God is with us.”

We live in a time where there's little peace in our broken world – unrest, struggle, pain, chaos and wars. Sometimes it hits closer to home, in our families and neighborhoods, when people are at odds with one another. God's desire is for Jesus to rule over all. Though we may be facing a painful situation, an unfavorable diagnosis, a struggle to restore a relationship, anxiety about the circumstances swirling around us – hear the angels “Do not be afraid...on earth peace... in you peace.”

Though the world may be in disarray and turmoil around us, may we find peace in knowing we've been made right with God through the blood of Jesus. May we find peace knowing that He is with us. We aren't alone.

After “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!”

Two missionaries named Bosshardt and Hayman were captured by the Chinese Communists on Christmas Eve 1934. The two captives sat bound in a small room with guards posted to ensure they didn't talk. When morning came, Bosshardt remembered it was Christmas day. He recalled later, “Our Lord sent a message to me in one word which made a world of difference - ‘Emmanuel - God with us.’” Since he was forbidden to speak, he took bits of straw and spelled out the comforting Name in English on the rough floor. Mr. Hayman understood. Bosshardt, “Knowing we should be imprisoned no longer than He would allow we rejoiced in tribulation” (Bosshardt 51). They were released on Easter 1936. (*Someone to Be with Roxie: The Life Story of Grace Reed Liddell Cox Missionary in China 1934-1944*).