

Christmas Peace

Micah 5:4-5; Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:13-14

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INTRODUCTION

One of my favorite TV shows is Seinfeld. I guess it appeals to me because it's about nothing. I don't have to sit there figuring out the plot. There's nothing to figure out. One of the episodes is about George Costanza's dad, Frank, learning a relaxation technique by saying, "Serenity Now. Serenity Now." Frank's doctor gave him a therapy tape to listen to, and every time his blood pressure starts to rise, the man on the tape advised him to say, "Serenity Now." The funny thing is, he doesn't say it, he screams it. And it doesn't work. No matter how much he bellows out "serenity now," he was never able to get a grip of it.

George's friend, Lloyd, who used to be in a mental institution, tells him, "Serenity Now doesn't work. That's what put me in the institution. It's Serenity Now, Insanity later."

People are looking for peace and serenity now, and some will do anything to get it. Some try therapy and counseling, others try drinking, eating, working or jumping from one relationship to another. People want peace and are looking for peace.

World leaders today talk eloquently about peace and wanting peace. Even conquerors of old came killing in pursuit of peace. Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon – they all sought a peaceful world order. I read that even Adolf Hitler contended that everything he did in Germany was for peace.

We don't live in a peaceful world. This country is in the midst of a global war on terror. And there are hundreds of wars going on right now. Screen writer Leonard Levinson says that peace-time is "the white space between the chapters in the history books."

Not only that we don't have world peace, many people don't have peace in their hearts and minds. You only have to glance at the headline news to see that peace is seldom a reality. There are school shootings, shopping mall shootings, and even church shootings. In the past two weeks, here in San Antonio, there

were a couple of shootings that left four children dead. And this time of year, people are worried and nervous about the economy, inflation and layoffs. Our world is in desperate need of peace.

The Bible says in Jeremiah, “they want peace, but they will find no peace.” Why? Because they look for it in the wrong place.

The Christmas story is about a God who came down to reach out to us, to give us peace, to be our Prince of Peace.

Look with me in the book of Micah who prophesized the coming Messiah who will be our peace and what kind of peace He is bringing. Chapter 5:2-5...

*(2)"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times."*

*(3)Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor gives birth
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.*

*(4)He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.*

(5)And he will be their Peace."

Then in Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah prophesized saying...

*For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God,
The Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

LESSON

Micah said that Jesus will come to be our peace. Isaiah said that he will be called the Prince of Peace. And when Jesus was born some 700 years later, the angels announced to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth Peace, goodwill toward men...” (Luke 2:13-14)

It’s interesting that Jesus came at a time when the world had already achieved the greatest peace it had ever known. The period between 27 BC and 180 AD was known as *Pax Romana*, Latin for “the peace of Rome.” The Roman Empire had been firmly established, and there were little military expansions, little crimes and few rebellions going on. And when Caesar Augustus ordered all the people of the known world to return to their home town and register so they could be taxed, everyone peacefully followed his decree. Today, the United Nations, the symbol of world peace, can’t even collect dues from its members nor can they agree on anything. The world is in desperate need of peace.

So on that first Christmas day, prophecies were fulfilled and Jesus came to bring Peace to the world. The angels came announcing that the Prince of Peace has arrived. Peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

What does it mean “peace on earth” and that Jesus came to give us peace? If He came to give us peace, why are there still wars, conflicts, pains, diseases, sufferings, tensions, poverty, and a plethora of other problems?

When we think of peace, we think of being in a state of tranquility and harmony or an absent of war, conflict, tension and problems.

The Bible uses peace in a different way. The OT was written in Hebrew. The word used is *SHALOM*. And *SHALOM* is understood by the world to mean “peace.” But peace is only a small part of the meaning of the word *SHALOM*. *SHALOM* has a much deeper meaning than our English word “peace.”

SHALOM literally translated “completeness, wholeness, fullness.” It carries a notion of friendship and covenant relationship. It is having health and being well. It is safety and welfare. There is soundness of mind and body. It also means prosperity and blessing. *SHALOM* can also be translated to mean Salvation. And this does give us a nice word picture of what Salvation looks like. (source: *Web Blue Letter Bible*)

SHALOM is so significant that people in Israel greet one another and bid farewell with the same word, like we say “hi” and “bye.” When a person greets and bids farewell to each other with *SHALOM* they are proclaiming God’s blessing, God’s salvation, and God’s favor on each other. They are pronouncing God’s wholeness and welfare upon one another. It’s kind of like people say “God bless you” or “godspeed” to wish someone a successful journey or good fortune.

When Isaiah writes of Jesus as *Sar Shalom* (the Prince of Peace), he is saying that Jesus, the Son of God who is completely whole and perfect in all things, will come to bring completeness, wholeness and harmony between God and man. That’s what Christmas is about. God took the initiative through Jesus to reach out to us and offer His *SHALOM*, to make us whole again, to make peace with us.

Paul writes in Romans 5:1, “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

You see sin caused a deep chasm between man and God. It made us an enemy of God. Sin broke our relationship with Him. Sin separated us from God for eternity. But the Prince of Peace came to bring God’s forgiveness and God’s wholeness in us. He came to unite and to restore our covenant relationship and friendship with God. He came to be a blessing to us. He came to be our salvation, to reconcile God and sinners, to offer his forgiveness...to make us whole and complete so that we could live life to the fullest or to have fullness of life.

The psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger, once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day and begin a new life.

And that’s what Jesus did on Christmas day. He came to tell us that God is offering his forgiveness and we can walk a new life if we will accept His *SHALOM*. You see, *SHALOM* is a Person. Jesus *is* *SHALOM*. And Jesus is offering Himself to us. Jesus is the picture of what *SHALOM* is all about...wholeness, perfect, wellness, complete, salvation, and blessing. And that’s who Jesus is and what He brings and offers us today.

Let me illustrate what I mean by Peace is a Person. In John 14:27 just before Jesus went to the cross, he comforted his disciples with these words, “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.” And then later in John 16:33, he said, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world.”

Shortly after that, Jesus died a horrible death and his body was literally tortured and butchered. After three days, he rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples. Jesus found them hiding in a room for fear of the Jews.

So in the midst of their fears and guilt, in the midst of hurt, despair and loneliness, in their darkest hour, Jesus showed up. He stood in their midst and greeted them, “Shalom,” “Peace be with you.” And He didn’t just say it one time, he said it twice. “Peace be with you.”

Earlier we said that *SHALOM* is how Jewish people greet one another. Jesus was not just offering a greeting here. He came with a message. *SHALOM* was message of hope, a message of comfort, a message of encouragement.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples and said, “Peace be with you” he is saying, “Three days ago, you saw me broken, bruised and beat up. You saw me disfigured and defeated. You saw me in sweat and blood. You saw me suffered and died. Now look at Me. See my hands. See my side. I am well. I am whole. I am complete. I am one. Everything is okay. Wholeness and perfect and well being is in your midst. All is well. Everything is okay. May it be well with you.”

SHALOM is a Person. And Jesus is the *SHALOM* who comes into the world on Christmas day to give us forgiveness, to give us wholeness, to make us complete, to give us welfare, security, salvation and blessing.

CONCLUSION

Some of you need to receive God’s *SHALOM* today. Maybe you are hurting and your heart is broken, and you’re living in fear, pain and regret. Other of you may be dealing with rejection and loneliness, financial stress, relationship issues. Maybe you are tired, sick and unhealthy or you feel discouraged and disappointed. Jesus comes saying, “*SHALOM*. Peace be with you. Let Me be your *SHALOM*. Let Me put the pieces back together. Let Me make you whole and complete again. Let Me bring health and well-being in your body. I will make everything okay. Let me be your Salvation. I am your *Sar Shalom*.”

The prophecies of Micah and Isaiah were fulfilled on that first Christmas day. Jesus came, and there was Peace on Earth.

There's a song that says, "let there be peace on earth – and let it begin with me." The way it can begin with me is that we let it begin with God. We invite the Prince of Peace into our heart and our life.

And when we have God's Shalom in our life, we extend that Shalom to others and be the Peacemaker, we are proving ourselves to be God's People. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemaker, for they shall be called children of God." Amen? SHALOM and may the Prince of SHALOM be with you!