

## The Prince of Peace Has Come

Intro: In Luke 2:14 the angels cry that the birth of Jesus Christ brings peace to men on whom God's favor rests. Peace on earth is an annual phrase printed in the millions at this time of year. But what is peace? What does it have to do with God's favor? Do we even need peace with God?

1. What is Peace? Peace is the removal of an obstacle of contention
  - a. Within every contention there are grievances, *injustices* that create enmity
    - i. At the root of every broken relationship is some injustice
    - ii. The offended party must be satisfied for there to be a healing of enmity
  - b. For peace is not merely the absence of contention (peace-keeping), but the obliteration of the obstacle between parties that caused the contention (peace-making)
  
2. Why Do We Need Peace With God? Sin has brought us into conflict with God, *for He is just* and is wrathful against sin.
  - a. Because God is just, God has burning anger (wrath) against injustice (Zeph 3:5-8).
    - i. God reveals Himself in wrath against injustice (Rom 2:5)
    - ii. Truth cannot be existent with error, injustice with perfect justice, sin with holiness. God is so different that He rightly hates sin and therefore burns with wrath and retribution because of it.
  - b. Not believing in the Son means that one is still under God's coming wrath (John 3:36; Ephesians 2:3)
  - c. God's wrath and judgment is real against those who sin against Him. Sin has arisen between God and man and made us in desperate need of a great Peace-Maker!
    - i. Romans 3:23, *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*
  - d. Our sin (injustice toward God) has created enmity (an obstacle) between us and God
    - i. This obstacle is not the injustice itself, but rather it is God's justice
      1. Why can't God just forgive us? Why does there have to be a contention?
      2. Because God is just!
        - a. Every injustice must be paid for. We all feel this truth within our own relationships.
        - b. For every injustice creates a debt. It cannot be ignored, it must be paid (atoned) for.
        - c. We all need to know that injustice will be paid up, that evil doesn't win in the end. If you have ever been the victim of terrible injustice, you know that this truth is real.

"[You say] you can't conceive of a God who would ever punish anyone — that wouldn't be loving. But you have to understand God's [justice]. If I backed into the door of your new car out in the parking lot, and we went to court, and the judge said, 'That's no problem, Bill didn't really mean it,' you'd be up in arms. You'd want justice. If you went to a Cubs game, and Sutcliffe threw a strike down the middle of the plate, and the ump said, 'Ball four,' and walked in a run, you'd be out there killing the ump, because you want justice. [You] hear that and say, 'I guess you're right. I wouldn't want a God who wasn't just.' But before you say, "Rah, rah for a just God," let me tell you some of the implications. That means he metes out justice to you."

~ Bill Hybels

- e. When we become aware of our desperate situation under God's wrath, and feel the guilt of our sin against the holy backdrop of the severe holiness of God, we must beware the twin evils of accusing and excusing:

- i. Accusing: Satan will tempt you to despair over your sin, feel its great guilt, and then try to save yourself by religion (*No faith* in Jesus as the Redeemer)
  - 1. He is the accuser of the redeemed (Rev 12:10) and wants you to live in joyless guilt over your sin.
  - 2. He gives you a half-truth that you are guilty (but he will not take you to Jesus)
    - a. Satan tempts us into believing that as long as we make up for our sins by doing good deeds, we will be OK with God. That peace is found through good deeds!
      - i. He distracts us with religion and half-truths. You are accused and you are guilty, but Satan doesn't want you to see Jesus, he wants you to attempt to save yourself.
      - ii. Why? Because he knows that you'll never make it.
    - b. At the root of this joyless guilt is really self-righteousness. We feel that we have failed and there is not really any help. We give lip service to God's redemption in Christ, but we wallow and over-grieve, living instead in anxiety and fear because *we have not done enough*. We have forgotten that we are saved by sheer grace and that Jesus has done it all!!
      - i. We believed the half-truth, the half-gospel, that our sin is greater than we can even imagine, but we have forgotten about Jesus.
- ii. Excusing: While accusing you, Satan will tempt you into thinking that your sin is not so bad. He will try to get you to believe that God doesn't punish anybody.
  - 1. The half-truth that God loves you. (*No repentance* of our sins as the righteous cause of God's wrath against us)
  - 2. He is the tempter of the brethren and the excuser of sin (Jer 6:14) and wants you to think that sin isn't that bad in the eyes of God.
    - a. At the root of excusing is the false-peace that we proclaim in the name of grace! We sweep sin under the rug of grace and do not learn to hate it or to grieve over it. We excuse it in actuality and do not repent of its deeper root of pride and self-righteousness. Because at the root of excusing sin is the belief that I am not that bad off. I don't really need a complete Savior because I'm going to be OK. God wouldn't punish sin, He is love, right? So we stay in sin, finding no power to overcome it or to live in the joy of redemption, finding comfort in the apathetic shallowness of self-righteous pride and amorphous false-humility. This is pride at its worst!
    - b. "We all make mistakes" – truth that is twisted to excuse our sins by comparing ourselves to one another
      - i. Romans 2:15, our conscience accuses and excuses us in our sin
      - ii. 2 Cor. 10:12, those who compare themselves by themselves

"And so our thoughts go round and round, one half of us accusing ourselves and the other half excusing ourselves, and all the time we are thus excusing ourselves we are getting farther and farther from the grace of God and from peace. This was precisely the effect that the accusations of his friends had on Job. In suggesting that the trials came as a result of some wrong in him, they provoked him to assert vigorous innocence, and on that ground he found that God fought against him. Upright man that he really was, he had none the less to be *broken* to accept the sinner's place before he could be at peace with God." ~Roy and Revel Hession

- 3. How Has Jesus Satisfied God's Justice and God's Love? The One True Peace-Maker Has Come
  - a. Christmas! The advent (arrival) of the Peace-Maker
    - i. Luke 2:14

- b. Jesus saved us by becoming the curse of the law for us and living the perfect law on our behalf
  - i. The Great Exchange: His righteousness for our sins
  - ii. He put Himself under the law for us (Gal 4:4-5)
  - iii. He did this in order to redeem us from the law and make us sons and daughters of God.
  - iv. Colossians 1:20
- c. Jesus' purpose in being born as a boy was to redeem His people from their sins by bearing God's wrath for them: He satisfies God's justice against sin
  - i. Matt 1:21
  - ii. Mark 10:45
  - iii. Luke 5:32
  - iv. 1 Tim 1:15
  - v. Heb 2:14-17

- 1. Propitiation was necessary to appease God's wrath against sin
  - a. OT has over 20 words to express God's wrath
  - b. They occur over 580 times in the OT
  - c. The NT also speaks of the wrath of God
    - i. John 3:36
    - ii. Rom 1:18; 2:5; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19
    - iii. Revelation is replete with references (6:16-17)
- 2. 1 John 4:10, Jesus was the required propitiation
  - a. Typically the offender offers propitiation, but here the offended party pays the price of propitiation as a gracious gift
  - b. Only the blood of the perfect Son of God was sufficient in value to placate, and even remove the wrath of God and replace it with peace, mercy, and sonship

"The cross does not represent a compromise between God's wrath and love; it does not satisfy each one half-way. Rather, it satisfies each fully in the very same action." ~Timothy J. Keller

- vi. The first step into entering the Kingdom of Heaven, into peace with God is not doing better or trying harder, it is coming undone (repentance, Mark 1:15) and seeing the desperate situation of enmity between us and God. Recognizing that we need a Savior to stand in our place and satisfy the justice of God

"The doctrine of the propitiation is precisely this – that God loved the objects of His wrath so much that he gave his own son to the end that he by his blood should make provision for the removal of his wrath." ~John Murray

- d. In the gospel of Jesus the Holy Spirit *convicts us of our sin*, and then takes us to Jesus, where we see the whole truth of the gospel of Jesus:
  - i. we are more deeply sinful that we even know and that sin is terribly egregious and an affront to God Himself. It brings wrath and judgment and Hellfire! **It is so serious and real that Jesus had to come and die to satisfy God's justice!**
  - ii. we are more deeply loved than we can even dare to hope, for God did not leave us under His wrath but sent His Son to die in our place and bear up our sins, even in their ferocity. **By His grace He has done it all and He loves us so much that He DID die for us to satisfy God's justice!**
    - 1. So, in the gospel we see that:
      - a. we cannot stay in the realm of accusation, for when we do we have forgotten the grace of Jesus and His complete work on the cross. We don't believe that Jesus satisfied God's justice.

- b. Nor can we live without the truth that our sin rightly brings God's wrath and live only in the realm of excusing our sins; of false-peace, where we excuse our sin as nothing and pass it off as inconsequential. We don't repent. We have forgotten that we are saved by sheer grace and it took the death of the Son of God to free us from sin's deadly grasp.
  - 2. If we forget either of these truths, we will be buffeted by fear, anxiety, and pride, living our lives being tossed back and forth without peace. Maybe you live there today and you feel tossed about, listless, and terror has overcome you more and more often as of late.
- e. So Now:
  - i. 1 Thess 1:10, delivered from the wrath to come
  - ii. 1 Thes 5:9, God has not destined us for wrath
  - iii. In Jesus He has chosen, adopted, redeemed, and sealed believers with His Holy Spirit!  
The ultimate example of peace!

#### Conclusion:

Look to the cross of Jesus Christ to find your peace, for at the cross of Christ the love of God meets the justice of God so that God is "both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Rom 3:26) Can you really have peace with God, this rest that has eluded you for so long? Yes!! Emphatically, yes!! And it comes from God Himself. What kind of God is this? He who, though being the one in the right, the offended of our sin, took the step from eternity to enter into the suffering of His creation and make peace with a rebellious people by bearing up His own just wrath! Remember this truth of the gospel of peace today, and as you exchange love and gifts with your family and friends, take heed to this truth: Bethlehem's stable expectantly rests in the long, dark, shadow of Golgatha's cross, where Jesus made our peace with God. Repent freely of your sins and failures, for in this repentance you have placed your first foot across the threshold of peace. And place your trust in the righteousness of Christ and in His blood to atone for your sins, not trying to earn God's peace or His favor, but humbly accepting Christ's work on your behalf. In this you take the second step across the threshold of peace with God (Rom 5:1, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*). Look to Jesus today. Some of you, it may be the first time; enter into peace with God through faith in Jesus. For others, you may already have a relationship with God through Jesus, but your fellowship with Him has dried up into pools of resentment and joylessness. Repent again of relying on your own righteousness and humbly turn to your Savior in humble trust. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the End of your journey, not a means to it. In His face, walking with Him, you will find that He is all that you need, no matter your trouble, and He alone is your rest.

Contemplate with me these thoughts from Robert Murray M'Cheyne:

He was without any comforts of God — no feeling that God loved him — no feeling that God pitied him — no feeling that God supported him. God was his sun before — now that sun became all darkness... He was without God — he was as if he had no God. All that God had been to him before was taken from him now. He was Godless — deprived of his God. He had the feeling of the condemned, when the Judge says: "Depart from me, ye cursed," "who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." He felt that God said the same to him. Ah! This is the hell which Christ suffered. The ocean of Christ's sufferings is unfathomable... He was forsaken in the [place] of sinners. If you close with him as your surety, you will never be forsaken... "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" [The answer?] For me — for me.

~ Robert M. M'Cheyne

## Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

1. Why couldn't God "just forgive us" (use biblical material to form your answer)?
2. Read Romans 3:21-26.
  - a. What can we learn about God's righteousness and how we can acquire it?
  - b. Why does God only justify based upon his atoning sacrifice (propitiation)?
  - c. How does the Jesus' sacrifice on the cross make God both "just and the justifier" of those who believe?
3. Looking at the accusing/excusing aspect of our guilt, how do you particularly struggle with each area?
  - a. Accusing: where do you struggle with guilt, despair/depression, question God's love, try harder to "impress" God?
  - b. Excusing: where do you tend to take sin lightly, not repent quickly, sluff off feelings of guilt
  - c. How does the gospel of Jesus' sacrifice speak to each of these areas?
4. Pray for one another, that we all would come to comprehend:
  - a. the severity of our sin and come to quickly repent of it
  - b. the greatness of God's love and come to quickly believe it even in the midst of trying circumstances
5. Interact with M'Cheyne's quote above.
  - a. How does it make you see Jesus? Yourself? God's justice? God's grace?
  - b. How does this aspect of Jesus' sacrifice humble you?
  - c. How does it embolden you?
  - d. How believing the gospel lead you to bring peace in your relationships with others?