

A Time for Reconciliation

Luke 2:14 NIV
Isaiah 9:6 NIV

Preface

This week we continue our sermon series – “What is Christmas?” If you missed either of the last two week’s messages – “A Time for Celebration” and “A Time for Salvation”, you can read them on our church website at www.BarnwellBaptist.org.

Today we continue our series with What is Christmas? Christmas is “A Time for Reconciliation.”

Scripture

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men..” Luke 2:14 KJV

⁶ “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6 NIV

Introduction

We have been studying the angel’s announcement of the birth of Christ and the real meaning of Christmas in the life of a Christian.

Christmas is a Time for Celebration – “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” We celebrate that facts that God Loves Us, God is With Us and God is For Us.

Christmas is a Time for Salvation – “For unto you is born this day a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” Jesus Saves Us From Sin, Saves Us For A Purpose and Saves Us By Grace.

Finally, Christmas is a Time for Reconciliation – “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Christmas is a time for reconciliation or peace if you will. Christmas is not a season for peace, it is a season for discovering everlasting peace.

Illus: In today’s “trade-in / trade-up” marriage mentality, couples often seek a divorce on the grounds of “Irreconcilable Differences.” This means they have a divide between them that they do not believe can be reconciled. They are wrong but never the less they think their problems are beyond reconciliation.

Most often reconciliation is possible. Anyone who has ever had a big fight with their spouse knows that making up can be really fun. There is something about making up that just seems to restore the relationship and bring about a relieving peace.

Through God’s grace, everyone who accepts Christ can experience the joy and peace of reconciliation. In our text, the angel tells us that reconciliation is what will bring peace and good will to men.

Real peace comes from reconciliation with God. I am not speaking of some sort of national reconciliation, but individual, personal reconciliation. Real peace must begin in our individual hearts.

Rick Warren puts it this way, “There will never be peace in the world until there is peace in nations. There will never be peace in nations until there is peace in communities. There will never be peace in communities until there is peace in families. There will never be peace in families until there is peace in individuals. There will never be peace in individuals until we invite the Prince of Peace to reign in our hearts. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.”

Jesus is the agent of peace. He speaks of this in John 14:27.

²⁷Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. John 14:27 NAS

Many years ago I wrote in the margin of my Bible beside this verse, “Cure for Crazy.” When I read this verse, my first thought was that understanding this verse is the key to having peace in a crazy and demanding world.

So what is this great peace that comes with reconciliation with God?

1. Peace with God is Spiritual Peace

Trying to live your life without God is the same as being at war with God. In other words, we can be at odds with our Creator.

Before you can have peace with others, you must first be at peace with God. Peace with God does not come from making promises to be good.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8 NIV

Peace with God comes only by faith in God’s grace. We must first recognize and desire God’s grace. God does not force it upon us. He offers it to us as a gift. And when we accept His grace, we discover real lasting peace through our reconciliation with Him.

Illus: We all know people who do not have spiritual peace. These are usually the people who seem to be mad at the world. They feel like God is always giving them a raw deal, a bad hand if you will. People who do not have spiritual peace are like old fireworks – they are unpredictable and you never know how they are going to react when they light up.

Without spiritual peace, one cannot find peace in the work place, at home or with others. Peace with God must come first and we must all seek it with everything we have.

Illus: I get amused these days when you purchase something. You go into a store, make your selection and then go to the check-out to pay for it. You hand over your hard earned money and instead of saying “Thank you,” the clerk says “Have a good one” or “Have a nice day.” What does that mean? Are they really wishing me a good day or is just a gesture? If you really want me to have a nice day, don’t charge me \$3.00 per gallon for gasoline.

If I said to you as a departing statement, “Peace to you,” it would really just be a wish or gesture. I would be saying I wish you peace but I don’t have the ability to grant you peace. When the world offers you peace, it offers a gesture or wish rather than real peace.

But when Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you” He is speaking of much more than a gesture. He is speaking of real peace, spiritual peace that is available to all believers who by faith rest in His spirit; who walk in fellowship with God.

To the world, peace is something you hope and work for, but for the believer, peace is a gift, a gift from God.

To the world, peace is the absence of trouble. To a Christian peace is to be enjoyed in spite of the presence of trouble.

Christmas is a Time for Reconciliation for it is through Christ that we find spiritual peace with God.

2. Peace with God is Peace with Ourselves

Once we find spiritual peace with God, we have emotional peace in our hearts. In other words, we discover peace with ourselves.

Many people today are not at peace; never satisfied and never happy with life. The reason is because they have not found peace with themselves. Some people are too busy trying to be someone else because they aren’t happy with who they are.

³³ *“I have told you these things, 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 NIV*

Dr. Adrian P. Rogers (1931-2005), pastor emeritus Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, use to tell of an experience where he sat next to a teenage girl on a flight to Atlanta.

He says the girl was about 15 years old and she looked very lonely. After a while he turned and began a conversation with her.

I said, ‘How are you?’

‘Fine.’

‘Are you going on vacation?’

She said, ‘I’m going to visit my aunt.’

I said, ‘How long are you going to stay?’

She said, ‘Well, about six weeks. I’m going to spend the summer. I’m going to work and try to earn some money.’

I said, ‘Let me ask you a question. Have you been thinking about giving your heart to Jesus? Have you been thinking about being saved?’

She looked at me and said, ‘Mister, I want to ask you a question. Is suicide a sin?’

I said, 'Little lady, yes, suicide is a sin. But you don't have to think of suicide because Jesus said, *'I'm come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.'*

I took the Word of God and began to share with her from the Word of God. She told me how her stepfather was an alcoholic. She told me how the aunt whom she hardly knew was a drunkard.

She poured out a little bit of the disappointment and heartache of her life and I shared with her how Jesus, the virgin-born Son of God who is the Savior, died for her sin and how much God loved her.

That day on the flight to Atlanta, the young lady gave her heart to Jesus Christ and was born again. She found real peace with herself.

Before others will ever accept you, you must first learn to accept yourself. Spiritual peace with God means peace within yourself.

3. Peace with God is Peace with Others

Not only does spiritual peace means peace with ourselves, it also brings peace with others. Through Christ we have reconciliation with God, ourselves and with others.

When we discover spiritual reconciliation we can find reconciliation in our marriages, our families and other broken relationships. When we experience grace we begin to dispense grace; we learn how to forgive and throw away our grudges.

"Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God." Matthew 5:9 KJV

When we experience God's mercy through Christ, He gives us a clean heart and peace within. But having received His mercy, we then share His mercy with others. We seek to keep our hearts pure and we become peacemakers in a troubled world.

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 NIV

Just as anger breeds anger, forgiveness breeds forgiveness. When we fully experience God's love and forgiveness, we become agents of that forgiveness.

We become Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation. Perhaps this Christmas you need to rebuild a broken relationship. You can allow Jesus to fill you with His love and lead you to love as He does with forgiveness and grace.

Your ability to forgive and love others is not dependent on your relationship with others. It is dependent on your relationship with God.

Illus: I had a stepfather whose name was Myron Barnes. He was meaner than a snake. He used to beat my mother and he used to slap me across the face. I grew up hating Myron and dreamed of the day I would be big enough to go back and beat the stew out of Myron Barnes. As a young teen, I had few goals in life but that was one I fully intended to keep.

Not only did I grow big enough to get my revenge on Myron, I grew too big to get that revenge. I grew spiritually in such a way that I was able to forgive and be free from the hatred and anger. I found peace through Jesus Christ.

Through Christmas, God sent the Prince of Peace and when the Prince of Peace is in your heart, you will have peace with others; you will experience real joy.

Conclusion

God's peace is nothing of man's doing. It doesn't come from positive thinking, self help books or good works. It is present even in the worse of circumstances. God's peace is a reward for our faith.

The Bible says God's peace guards (like a soldier) our hearts and minds. The heart and mind can take us to the pinnacle of enthusiasm or to the pits of despair. The heart and mind can provoke us to commit amazing acts of kindness or flagrant acts **of sin**. God's peace is the force that guards our hearts and minds, keeping them pure.

Let the peace that Christ can give keep on acting as umpire in your hearts (Col. 3:15) Wms.

Illus: I remember when I was a young boy. I could not stand to have a quarrel with my Mother. My mother was the only stable thing I had in my life before becoming a Christian. My relationship with her was so extremely important. Though she was not perfect, she would do anything for her children.

I can remember when I was a child some mornings I would get into an argument with her. Perhaps it would be about my hair, how I was dressed or about homework that didn't get done. Usually the argument didn't go far but sometimes it did. I would leave the house upset and walk down to the end of the street where I was to catch the bus.

The more I stood at the bus stop and waited, the deeper the hurt and guilt of the argument would weight on me. The thought of going to school and being in the crowd but miserable was overwhelming to me. On many occasions, I slipped off into the woods and purposefully missed the bus just so I could go home and reconcile things with my Mother.

I would walk back into the house with tears in my eyes and tell her I just couldn't go to school with her upset with me.

You don't have to go another day in turmoil or without spiritual peace in your life. Skip the bus to the busy world and turn to God for reconciliation. You will find His grace and discover lasting peace.