



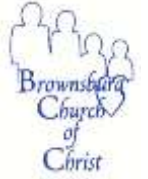
# Peace on Earth, Good Will To Men

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



## Introduction:

For just about everyone in America, today is a special day of the year. For many in our nation, it is viewed as a celebration of Jesus' birth. For most of us here, it is seen as a day to celebrate family, friends, and the completion of another year. Even for those of us who have decided not to celebrate Christmas at all, we can't help but be impacted by the cultural shift that takes place around us this time of year. In general, at this time of year, people are nicer, more generous, more forgiving. Elvis Presley's 1966 "If Every Day was Like Christmas" demonstrates this feeling as he asked, "Why can't every day be like Christmas? Why can't this feeling go on endlessly?" He spoke of cheer, smiles, and especially peace. If there is any message proclaimed the most this time of year it is that message of peace. In **Luke 2:14**, the angels proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (KJV). But what is this peace? I believe this passage is misunderstood by many today as highlighted by the 1864 poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: "Christmas Bells." Most of us have heard the carolized version of this poem and know it as "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." Longfellow explains that he hears the bells tolling forth their familiar carol of "Peace on earth, good will to men." The problem was he looked around him and didn't see peace or good will. He saw hate, fighting, and despair. In fact, when he wrote the poem, he saw the Civil War. You can imagine why Longfellow would write, "And in despair I bowed my head, 'There is no peace on earth,' I said, 'For hate is strong and mocks the song of 'Peace on earth, good will to men.''" A few months later the Confederacy surrendered, Lincoln was shot, and the long slow process of Reconstruction started. For many, this mirrored the final verse of Longfellow's poem: "Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: 'God is not dead nor doth He sleep! The wrong shall fail; the right prevail with peace on earth, good will to men!'" No doubt, this is a beautiful poem and all the more meaningful when we recognize the historical context of it. In its own right, it is a great poem and I don't want to take away from it. But I have to ask, is this really what **Luke 2:14** was all about? Were the angels talking about world peace? Were they talking about nations ceasing their wars? Were they talking about a cease-fire among all people? While the message of **Luke 2:14** would lead to all of that if actually pursued by all people, that is not the primary message of this verse. Let's examine this message and see that it leads us beyond the baby in the manger. It takes us right up to Golgotha's hill. It moves beyond emotional messages to soothe our hearts and takes us right to the practical point of how we choose to live every day. So what was the angels' real message.

## Discussion:

### I. "Peace on earth" in its historical context.

- A. When we hear the phrase "peace on earth" we think of it in the context of our present situation. Like Longfellow, we look around us and see wars and rumors of wars. We think that peace on earth means everyone simply laying down their arms. We imagine peace happening as everyone is filled with good will and decides to just lead our own quiet lives without harming others. That concept, however, was foreign to those under Roman rule. Keep in mind that when the angels made this proclamation, the Roman Empire was experiencing the Pax Romana. Under the rule of Caesar Augustus, the Romans were experiencing the longest period of peace they would know. But that peace didn't come as a result of people just laying down their arms. As much as I hate to quote Wikipedia, I think they describe the point the most succinctly, "Romans regarded peace not as an absence of war, but the rare situation that existed when all opponents had been beaten down and lost the ability to resist."<sup>1</sup> For those in the time of Rome, peace was won at the edge of the sword. It came when the enemies were defeated by superior strength.
- B. When the shepherds heard this message of peace, they did not think that the picture of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes would bring such warm fuzzies that everyone would lay down their malice and hate, drop their weapons, and embrace each other with good will. That's not how they saw peace. When they heard this message of peace, they heard a message of a conquering hero. What they would have foreseen in that baby was a coming king who would vanquish the enemies of their peace.
- C. And that is exactly what had been prophesied about the coming Messiah. Look at **Psalms 2**. Especially note **vss. 7-9**. The shepherds saw that begotten Son in the manger. The nations would be His heritage and He

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax\\_romana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax_romana)

would break them. Then notice **vss. 10-12**. The kings needed to recognize that they cannot defeat this Son. Instead, they need to kiss Him or they will perish in the way. Then there is the prophecy of **Isaiah 9:6-7**. **Luke 2:11** seems to allude directly to this passage. He will be the Prince of Peace. But how? Through the increase of His government, by judging with justice and righteousness.

- D. As Jews, no doubt, they saw this in a very material light. They thought of their greatest enemy as Rome. Sure, the empire was in the Pax Romana, but what good was peace when you were one of the nations that had been so beaten down that you simply couldn't resist any longer. They were looking for a Messiah to come and conquer the Romans so that their enemy would no longer be able to resist and the Jews would have their own peace. However, that was not the kind of peace the angels were proclaiming.

## II. Peace beyond our understanding

- A. **Philippians 4:7** explains that the peace of God is actually a peace which is beyond our understanding. In **John 14:27**, Jesus explained that the peace He was bringing was not a peace as the world gives. It was not the kind of peace the Jews were looking for. They were looking for a physical peace with their nation dominating Rome into such subjection that they couldn't resist. But Jesus was bringing a different peace. A peace of the heart and mind. Jesus' kingdom was not a kingdom of this world.
- B. We see the hint of this misunderstanding in **John 6:15**. The people wanted to force Him to be their king. That wasn't Jesus' plan; so He slipped away. Then again we see this in **Matthew 26:51-56**. The enemies were coming to take the Messiah and one of the disciples thought it was time to rise up and fight. He cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. But Jesus stopped him. He explained that if His plan were to bring about peace through this kind of fighting, He could have already done it. He could have called 12 legions of angels and wiped out all of Rome, bringing peace to the Jews. But that was not His plan.
- C. In **John 18:33-36**, Pilate questioned Jesus about His kingship. Jesus explained, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world" (ESV). Jesus did not come to establish an earthly kingdom that would bring about world peace. Jesus came to establish a spiritual kingdom. He came not to conquer Rome and bring the Jews peace. He came to conquer the domain of darkness so that He might bring all men peace (**Colossians 1:13**). But what did He do to accomplish this peace?

## III. What Jesus did to bring peace

- A. While Jesus did not come to bring the kind of peace Rome and the Jews were looking for, He did come as a conquering king. He did not simply come as a cuddly baby expecting everyone to be overcome by His preciousness and be moved to have good will toward everyone else. He came into the world as a baby, but grew to be a conquering hero. His enemy, however, wasn't Rome or the Jews. His enemy was the devil himself (**Ephesians 6:12**). Jesus came forth to conquer our greatest enemy.
- B. We may have a hard time seeing this Jesus in the manger. But look at the white rider in **Revelation 6:1-2**. With bow and crown, He went forth conquering and to conquer. We see Him again in **Revelation 19:11-16**. He will strike down all enemies, death, the devil, and any forces Satan uses to attack Jesus' people.
- C. But the amazing thing is that these are figurative pictures of what Jesus did to the enemies. These apocalyptic images are simply intended to teach us the grandeur of Jesus' victory. But what did Jesus do to actually accomplish this victory that can bring about the peace we simply do not understand? He did the exact opposite of what anyone would expect. He did not take up arms. He did not establish a standing army in Jerusalem. Instead, He lived among us. He taught among us. He was persecuted among us. Then He was executed among us. He did not fight. He surrendered to the plan of God. The plan of God took Jesus to a cross.
- D. Read **Matthew 27:26-50**. In order to secure peace for us, Jesus didn't call the angels to fight off the enemies. He was scourged, the flesh being ripped from His body. He was stripped, mocked, beaten. He was given a crown of thorns and a false scepter. He was spit upon, slapped, ridiculed. Yet He took it all. He did not raise a finger. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, He was silent (**Isaiah 53:7-8**). But as **Isaiah 53:4-6**, Jesus did this to carry our sorrows. He did this to forgive our transgressions. Our iniquities were laid on Him. By His stripes we are healed. His chastisement brought us peace.
- E. **Ephesians 2:11-22** explains the peace that Jesus purchased on the cross. By going to the cross, Jesus abolished the law of commandments that kept us alienated from God by our sins. Further, He brought down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles. Finally, He brought us into a relationship with God. We are no longer foreigners to God; we are part of His family, His household. As **Colossians 1:19-22** says, through death on the cross He has reconciled all things to Himself and to God and we may be presented holy and blameless before Him.

- F. When the angels proclaimed peace on earth, good will toward men, they were not talking about everyone becoming friends. They were talking about a conquering King, coming into the world, vanquishing the enemies of our peace so that they could no longer resist. As **John 16:33** explains, we will have tribulation in the world. But we can take heart because Jesus has defeated the world. Therefore, while they attempt to bring tribulation upon us, we actually have peace in Jesus Christ. And **Romans 16:20** explains that the God of peace will crush Satan under our feet. He has vanquished and is vanquishing the enemy of our peace.

#### IV. How do we have this peace?

- A. What then is the difference between being one of those who receives this peace and being one of those who is part of the vanquished enemy who can no longer hinder this peace? Remember what **Psalms 2:10-12** said? We need to serve the Lord. We need to kiss the Son. We need to take refuge in Him. While it is great to remember the birth of Jesus on occasion, real peace takes more than giving a nod to the little baby Jesus once a year. We need to see that baby as the conquering king and take refuge in Him. We need to follow **Psalms 18:1-3**. He must become our rock, our refuge, our strong and mighty tower. Then He will save us from the enemies that would destroy our peace.
- B. As **Isaiah 9:6-7** said, Jesus' government would grow. If we want peace, we need to submit to His government. As **Luke 6:46** says, we need to do more than call Jesus "Lord." We must do what He says.
- C. According to **Romans 5:1-5**, we have peace with God through our faith in Christ. It is through that faith that we have access to God's grace. It is through faith we can rejoice even while we suffer, knowing that it will ultimately produce hope in the love of God. We gain peace, not by going our own way, but by faith in Jesus' way. We increase our belief that His way works and so we surrender to it, taking refuge in Him.
- D. **Colossians 2:8-15** explains that we begin to participate in this peace when we have been buried with Jesus in baptism. Then we are made alive and reconciled to God.
- E. **Philippians 4:4-9** explains that we continue in the peace of God by casting our cares upon Him. We make our requests known to Him with thanksgiving, refusing to give in to our anxieties. Further, we gain peace as we learn to focus our minds on the things of God. As we allow our minds to be moved by the things of the world, our peace will be stolen. However, when we focus on things that are lovely, pure, commendable, just, right, we gain a peace of mind. Finally, Paul says if we want peace, we need to practice the things we received from him. That is, we need to practice the teaching that came from Christ through the apostles.
- F. **Galatians 5:22-25** says the fruit of the Spirit is peace. If we want peace, we must walk by the Spirit. That is, we must let the Spirit be in charge of our lives, living by the revelation He has given in the Word of God.

#### V. Becoming peacemakers

- A. While what we have discussed is the primary message of the angels in **Luke 2:14**, we do see that there is a secondary principle that leads us closer to the common view of peace on earth. The fact is this peace that God has given to us is supposed to change us. God has set the example of peacemaking for us, making the ultimate sacrifice to bring peace between us and Him. We need to follow that example, sacrificing ourselves in order to pursue peace with others. As **Hebrews 12:14-15**, we are to pursue peace with everyone, which means not allowing ourselves to get caught up in bitterness because that will defile us. As **Romans 12:18** says, as much as it depends on us, we are to be at peace with all people.
- B. According to **Matthew 5:9**, the peacemakers are the sons of God. When we learn to make peace between ourselves and God, between ourselves and others, and between others and God, we become sons of God. The point of that statement is highlighted by our common phrase, "Like father, like son." When we are called sons of God, it is because we are becoming like Him. We may learn to dot all the Is and cross all the Ts about God's pattern of worship and work in the local congregation, but if we cannot have peace with one another we are not like God.
- C. Allow me to briefly remind you of the lessons we learned from **1 Peter 3:8-9** a few weeks ago about being at peace with others. Being a peacemaker doesn't mean expecting everyone else to come around to our way of thinking. It means pursuing harmony, understanding, brotherly love, compassion, humility, and doing these things even when others don't.

#### Conclusion:

Don't let December be the only time your life is changed. Don't simply get caught up in the spirit of the season. Let Jesus change your life all the time. Let Jesus be Lord of your life, bringing you the peace that passes understanding. He has vanquished the enemies. You must simply take refuge in Him. Why not let every day be like Christmas? Why not let Jesus' victory bring peace to your life and change you to be a peacemaker with others every day.