

"Glory to God, Peace for Us"

Luke 2:8-14

*"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."
(Luke 2:14)*

That's one of the more familiar Scripture verses we hear at Christmas. It appears a lot on Christmas cards, in Christmas carols and even Linus read it in 'A Charlie Brown Christmas' to help Charlie Brown understand what Christmas is all about. So somehow the culmination of the incarnation of Jesus Christ is all summed up in the angelic host proclaiming

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Glory to God, peace for us. How does that sum up the gospel? How does that summarize the Christian life? Because these two are connected; you can't have one and not the other. You can't glorify God without being at peace with God. You can't find peace with God without understanding His glory. Let's start with peace with God first.

When Luke wrote his gospel and Acts he wrote both books to a Roman official named Theophilus. His purpose was,

Luke 1:3 I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Luke's purpose in writing his gospel and Acts was to help Theophilus understand who Jesus is; either for himself and possibly as many scholars believe, Luke was trying to free Paul from prison by helping this Roman official who was in a position of power to help Paul, understand why Paul would choose to suffer for Jesus. If Theophilus could understand who Jesus truly is, he himself might find peace with God or at the very least understand Paul's passion for Jesus, and that he was no threat to the Roman Empire.

Ironically, Rome preached 'peace' and sought to establish 'peace' in the world. However, Rome's idea of peace was through force and control to convince people that an absence of war and strife is what peace is. That's not biblical peace. When we read 'peace' in the New Testament we must read 'Shalom' which is the Jewish idea of peace. Shalom means you are one with God and man. You are content. Your needs are met.

We see an illustration of Roman forced peace/control here in the birth account of Jesus. Emperor Augustus declared a census should be taken which required everyone to return to their place of birth for registration. This may have been for taxation purposes but it was also part of Rome's control; they wanted to know who legitimate citizens were and who were not. Luke dates this for Theophilus so he can validate it, during the reign of governor Quirinius.

So Joseph and Mary proceed to Joseph's family's place of origin; Bethlehem. Joseph is from the line of David (as is Mary according to Luke's genealogy in Luke 3). Due to the influx of people, no room is available for them in a public inn and Mary gives birth to Jesus who ends up being placed in a manger, which was a feeding trough for animals. It could have been a room in a house where the animals were kept or possibly in a shepherd's temporary shelter usually build with stones.

The birth of Jesus can't go unnoticed so for the third time in the birth accounts (first to Mary, then to Joseph in a dream) an angel appears, this time to shepherds in the fields surrounding Bethlehem and, the added special significance of the visible shekinah glory of God making an appearance. The glory of God departed from the temple in Jerusalem around 597 BC (590 years before Jesus' birth) during the days of Israel's exile to Babylon as recorded in Ezek. 8-12. God's presence left the temple because His people were worshipping idols in the temple. Meaning; God's relationship and Israel's was broken but not irreparable because of God's promises.

So the fact that God's presence has returned signifies God wants to restore His relationship with His people. Emmanuel has come as Isaiah prophesied. There's even a hint of Isaiah 9 here in Luke 2:10-11

¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord

"Unto us a child is born". So God's Son has been given to be born and He will save His people from their sins, as Gabriel told Joseph in a dream. And this results in an army of angels appearing and announcing Glory to God in the highest and peace to people on whom His favour rests. Here we understand that real peace/shalom isn't forced on you through military might and threats but

True Peace only Comes from God **(2:8-12)**

We know Luke is subtly making a comparison between Rome's idea of peace and God's offer of peace because he couches this in Emperor Announcement language. The word for "good news" is *euangelion* [evangelize]. This was reserved for a proclamation of 'good news' from the Emperor, because the Emperor was considered a god. But here, the true God makes

An announcement to all of good news (vv.8-9)

Not just good news but good news of great joy! God's Son has been born. And this news is for all people equally. How do we know? Because the angel appeared to the unfavoured of society. Shepherds were hard-working people who had the thankless task of raising sheep that, many of which would be sacrificed at the temple so that people's sins could be forgiven by God. This is not a coincidence. Because of their work of examining sheep this would make them unclean and unacceptable for worship. God says, 'No this is for all people.' God announces this to the shepherds who represent all people. But just because peace with God is announced as available it's not automatic that you have it. The passage shows, each one

Must discover for ourselves (v.10)

¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The shepherds had to believe the word from God was true and go see for themselves – which they would do. Peace with God is something everyone needs and needs to believe for themselves it is available for them. God appeared to the lowly and humble to communicate to those in society who've been told all their life they are 'unclean'; unworthy to enter God's presence, that God has come and wants a relation-ship with you. His glory was no longer hidden behind a veil inside a gold box; it was there for all.

Like the shepherds, if we want this peace with God we need

To believe by faith that salvation is available (vv.11-12)

¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord

“Today ... you will find ...” The shepherds were given an invitation that day to find out for themselves if what God spoke was true. Did a few choose not to go and didn't see this thing that had happened that the Lord told them about? We don't know. It sounds like they all went. But whoever believed what God said for themselves discovered what God said was true.

¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The shepherds heard what God said. They believed what God said was meant for them – the unclean of society. They acted on their faith and they saw what God said was true. Then they glorified God – just as the angels had. They understood then that ...

True Peace Brings Glory to God
(2:13-14)

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Now we begin to see how having peace with God brings glory to God. These angels already have a relationship with God. All of them were tempted by Lucifer to abandon God and join him in his efforts to dethrone God. One third of the angels chose to reject God – something unfathomable for us to come to grips with – and follow Satan. They will all fail. Even though they know who Jesus is and God is in their heads they refuse to glorify Him. This army of angels show us that glorifying God ..

Is the proper response to the gospel (v.13)

‘Glory to God in the highest’. “Glory” means to speak well of, honour, extol. “In the highest” means to the greatest extent. So the angels model for us the appropriate response when we see or hear the ways in which God works around us, when we experience His promises or when He answers our prayer (because this was also an answer to Israel's prayer for the Messiah to come) – that we too are to speak well of God, to give Him the credit/honour by verbal acknowledgement of His goodness to us and to others when we hear about His work in them.

But only those who have peace with God can do that.

Glorifying God and being at peace with God are inseparable (v.14a)

*Glory to God in the highest, **AND** on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”*

God is glorified (made much of) when people are at peace with God and each other. You can't glorify God when you're not at peace with God (you have sin you need to deal with), or with others (you have sinned against someone or need to forgive someone who has sinned against you) or yourself (you can't forgive yourself or you have an ungodly view of yourself – too high or too low). We

can't do what we've been called to do – glorify God with our lives – when we are in the way because of sin.

But when we have dealt with our sin then we see clearly. We are in a position to hear from God and can see more readily the hand of God around us. And we praise Him when we do. To glorify God and to be at peace with Him and others

Requires faith (v.14b)

Most of the translations translate it “peace to men on who His favor rests” or “on whom He favors.” It is not a blanket good will to all men in that everyone automatically receives it. The gospel is for everyone – that is clear, but only those whom God favours experience His peace. But who receives God's favour? Those who believe by faith in God's Word.

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

The one whom God favours or is pleased with is the one who has faith and exercises faith. That's what Hebrews 11 is all about. An active ongoing faith that started at salvation and continues to grow and develop. Faith is like a muscle that needs to be exercised regularly to grow strong and remain strong. The shepherds not only believed what God said they acted on it and as a result glorified God and experienced His joy in their life. This is helpful as we think about,

What Does this Look Like Practically?

How do we glorify God and enjoy God's peace with Him and one another on a day to day basis. First and foremost, and one cannot presume that everyone here is actually at peace positionally with God.

Peace with God

Rom. 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

All of us are born with sin and our sin separates us from God. We fall short of God's glory – His presence. Like the Tabernacle there is a veil that separates us from God and we don't have peace with Him. God sent Jesus to die for our sins. He rose from the dead to prove He was sinless and the Son of God. Only when we believe by faith that His death forgives our sins and makes possible peace with God, can we have peace with God. And when we accept Christ, His Spirit affirms it in our hearts that we are His children.

That is what we call positional peace; our standing before God. We are now His children. But there is an ongoing peace (relational peace) that we need to work at with God like any relationship. The apostle Paul writes in Rom. 15:13,

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

That word for 'as you trust' is the same word for "believing". God's joy and peace will fill us to overflowing as we continue to believe in His Word and act on it each day. We need to be hearers and doers of the Word, not mere hearers only and so deceive ourselves. Ongoing, growing, active faith in the words of God are the key to having continual peace with God. That's our vertical peace. There's also our internal peace with ourselves.

Peace with Ourselves

We worry. We fret. We have low opinion of ourselves. We are exposed to verbal, cyber and internal voices of self-doubt and unworthiness. But if we have peace with God we are accepted by God. He loves us. He knows everything there is about us and He still wants this relationship with us. How do we keep at peace internally?

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Our part is to roll everything over to God. To stop being anxious when anxiety creeps in – and it does. Some people have said worrying is a sin. No, refusing to stop worrying when we don't need to is a sin. This text literally says "When you start to worry put a stop to it. Understanding that we will worry and be anxious in this life. But when it happens give it to God. Another reason I know this is true from this passage is the word "guard". This is a military term. It assumes you will be under attack. Our enemy likes nothing more than for us to be self-absorbed about our own fears and weaknesses, always worrying about what people think of us. God loves us and wants to protect us so when we give our anxieties to Him, thanking Him for the ways He's working in our life, praying about the things we worry about, His peace of our security in Him will protect our emotional being and our spiritual being.

Peace with Others

And then there's peace with each other – horizontal peace. How do keep peace in our relationships? The way God and Jesus maintain our relationship with Him; continual forgiveness.

Eph. 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

A lot of our bitterness and anger is internal; not seen very often. But oh we know how to stew. We can get pretty worked up about wrongs done to us pretty quickly or even perceived wrongs done to us. Get rid of all that, like garbage. Throw it away. Counter that with kindness and compassion. You always have to replace a negative behavior or thought pattern with a positive, biblical behavior or thought pattern. Act like God who is kind and compassionate toward us, always ready to forgive. If we have Christ in us, we have the ability to forgive like Christ.

But what if they won't forgive us? God already knows that can happen and He still makes available His peace to us. Rom. 12:17,

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

God makes available to us a peace with Him and ourselves when we obey His Word and seek reconciliation even if the other person refuses. When we have done our part and not sought revenge and left it with God, God gives us His peace.

The gift of the gospel is peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Only when we're at peace with God and each other are we spiritually and mentally prepared to bring glory to God. We can't bring glory to God when we're not right with God, others or even ourselves. The two are inseparable.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Unto us a child is born. Jesus' birth and death is God's peace offering to us. Only when we accept His peace will we thank Him and glorify Him. And that's how we have continual joy in our hearts. Now that we have 'seen and heard this for ourselves what God has said' then let's "go and spread the word concerning what we have been told about this child; the peace, glory and joy that comes through Jesus Christ.

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