

## Longing for Peace

### Longing for the King – Crossroads Advent 2009

December 20, 2009 – Mark Bickel

#### - Peace on Earth

- *“Let There be Peace on Earth and let it begin with me”*
  - *Let there be peace on earth  
And let it begin with me.  
Let there be peace on earth  
The peace that was meant to be.  
With God as our father  
Brothers all are we.  
Let me walk with my brother  
In perfect harmony*
- .**President Obama** spoke of Christmas and Peace on earth as he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize last week:
  - *If for one day a year people can bury the hatchet, why can't every day be like Christmas? For there to be any hope of **peace on Earth and goodwill towards men**, the United States needs to set the example in getting itself and the rest of the world to lower our voices and start communicating, instead of yelling. Discussing, instead of fighting. If this lesson can be learned at home, and then taught abroad, finally that notion of peace will reach fruition.*
- Long before Obama, **God made promises of peace**:
  - For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, **The Prince of Peace**. Of the increase of His government and **peace there shall be no end**, upon the throne of David, and upon His Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with Judgment and with Justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6-7).
- **Peace is what the Jews longed for**:
  - A deliverer to defeat the Romans and bring freedom from foreign rule
  - A leader to re-establish Israel, uniting the various Jewish factions to bring peace within her borders
  - A messiah to lead them all into free worship of the One True God

- And then 2000 Year ago, at the birth of Jesus, the **Angel's Declared:**
  - *To Mary:* "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. **He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.** The Lord God will give him the **throne** of his father David, and he will **reign** over the house of Jacob forever; his **kingdom will never end.**" (Luke 1:31-33)
  - *To the Shepherd:* "Glory to God in the highest, and **on earth peace** among those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14)
  
- **"Whatever Happened to Peace on Earth"**
  - **While I love Christmas** – the decorations, the cookies, the fellowship with friends, the sights and sounds and smells of the season ... For many both here and abroad this **Christmas will not look like the cards and carols portray** things
  - *Willie Nelson wrote:*
    - **What Ever Happened To Peace On Earth?**  
*There's so many things going on in the world  
 Babies dying  
 Mothers crying  
 How much oil is one human life worth?  
 And what ever happened to peace on earth? ...*
  
- **Today we have anything but peace:**
  - **Wars** – country against country, tribe against tribe
  - **Famines**, poverty, starvation
  - Earthquakes, Floods, Tsunamis, other **disasters**
  - Partisan Politics, **Corruption**, Bribery, Greed, Embezzlement
  - **Crime** - on the streets, in the workplace, even in the home
  - **Family and Friends:** how many of us have relationships, even in our own family, that are anything but peaceful ... arguments, bitterness, verbal and physical abuse, divorce
  - **I know some of your stories** ... broken homes, dysfunctional homes ... some with good homes and godly parents still struggle with brothers, sisters, other close friends and relatives that have hurt you, that have turned against you, even turned against God.
  - Or maybe **you are even the one who is the rebel** – you are the one dealing with hate, bitterness, rejection ... maybe even regrets at this time of year. It is you who feels like the lost child that is the one with the hate

- Others come into the holidays with the **loss of loved ones and close friends** heavy on their hearts.
- **"I Heard the Bells"** by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow – 1864
  - One of my **favorite Christmas carols** is actually one that faces the sufferings of the times head on, it is not afraid to admit that all is not as the peaceful Christmas manger scenes would have us believe:
  - **Story of Longfellow:**
    - Henry **married Frances** Appleton on July 13th 1843, and they settled down in the historic Craigie House overlooking the Charles River in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They were blessed with the birth of their first **child**, Charles, on June 9th 1844, and eventually, the Longfellow household numbered five children-- Charles, Ernest, Alice, Edith, and Allegra.
    - **Tragedy struck both the nation** and the Longfellow family in 1861. Confederate Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard fired the opening salvos of the **American Civil War** on April 12th, and **Fanny Longfellow was fatally burned in an accident in the library of Craigie House** on July 10th. Failing to stop the fire with the rug, he tried to smother the flames by throwing his arms around Frances-- severely burning his face, arms, and hands. Fanny Longfellow died the next morning. Too ill from his burns and grief, Henry did not attend her funeral.
    - The first Christmas after Fanny's death, Longfellow wrote, "**How inexpressibly sad are all holidays.**" A year after the incident, he wrote, "**I can make no record of these days. Better leave them wrapped in silence. Perhaps someday God will give me peace.**" Longfellow's journal entry for December 25th 1862 reads: "**A merry Christmas' say the children, but that is no more for me.**"
    - Almost a year later, Longfellow received word that his **oldest son Charles**, a lieutenant in the Army of the Potomac, had been **severely wounded with a bullet** passing under his shoulder blades and taking off one of the spinal processes. The **Christmas of 1863 was silent** in Longfellow's journal.
    - Finally, on **Christmas Day of 1864**, he wrote the words of the poem, "**Christmas Bells.**"
  - **The Song: "Christmas Bells"**  
(The original poem, complete with all seven stanzas)

"I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
 Their old familiar carols play,  
 And wild and sweet  
 The words repeat  
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

And thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along  
The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black accursed mouth  
The cannon thundered in the South,  
And with the sound  
The carols drowned  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent  
The hearth-stones of a continent,  
And made forlorn  
The households born  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

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!"

... (let's pause here ... maybe this is where you are this Christmas – where Hate is Strong and is Mocking the song of Peace on Earth Good Will to Men")

- **People have a right to be skeptical of the Angel's proclamation!**
  - They said he was the king, yet instead of delivering his people he ended up being killed without so much as a good fight
  - The people thought he would restore Israel's land, religion, etc – and yet within 70 years of his birth Jerusalem was burned to the ground, and it has only gone down hill from there!
  - **If the birth of Jesus was supposed to bring Peace on Earth he has failed miserably!**

- **The Song is not over yet:** Longfellow's poem continues:

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!"

Till, ringing, singing on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime  
A chant sublime  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

- **The King Shall Come:**

- **Some of us have been reading Revelation** – seeing that the Manger, even the Cross and Resurrection, are not the end of the story ... The one born in the manger is also the King, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the one who will return to judge the living and the dead, the one who will cast out Satan, and will defeat all the kings of the Earth. He is the one who will indeed establish His Kingdom forever, who will create a new heaven and earth where there will be true, deep, lasting peace!
- ***More on that in 2 weeks***
- **But that still leaves the haunting question – why, if Jesus was God and had the power to bring Peace when he came 2,000 years ago did he not do it?**
- ***We will come to that question in a few minutes...***

- **Peace of Heart**

○ **Another Kind of King**

- *A few minutes ago we looked at what the Angel said to Mary in Luke:*

“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to **give him the name Jesus. He will be great** and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the **throne of his father David**, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1:31-33)

- *But the Angel gives another meaning for Jesus’ name to Joseph in Matthew:*

She will give birth to a son, and you are to **give him the name Jesus**, because **he will save his people from their sins.**” (Matthew 1:21)

○ **Another Kind of Peace**

- **Peace Within**

- *What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us – Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- Philippians talks of a **“peace of God” that surpasses understanding**

- **The Real War is Within**

- Honestly, most of us in the room today are not looking at physical war, or starvation, or even true hatred coming our way this particular Christmas ... but we all **still struggle with being at peace**, not just with those around us, but even more significantly being at **peace within**
- When I look at **myself I see the sin that so easily entangles me** – I see places this week where I have dishonored God, places where I have done or said things that may have hurt others, places where I have not said and done what I know I should do. I see thoughts I am not proud of, and ways I have sought pleasure for myself over loving God.
- Whether you call yourself a Christian or not, when we look within ourselves we **all find things we are ashamed of, or even scared of**
- And as we look around us, even the best of us see **broken relationships and hurting people** that we know **we have had a hand in hurting**, or at least have not had a hand in helping
- Whether you are generally optimistic or pessimistic, **we all have fears of the future**, things out of our control, or worse things that may well have seemed in our control at some point that we have set on the wrong path.

- We are **haunted by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future** – seeing our past failures, our present guilt and remorse, and our future fears.
  - Whether you are one to be easily depressed, one who wallows in self pity, one who beats yourself up for failure, or one who drowns your sorrows in alcohol, parties, food, or some other pleasure, or whether you are one who putting behind the past pulls yourself up and plows ahead to make a future for yourself, **when we stop to honestly look inside there is within us all these places of unrest, of lack of peace**
- **The Real Peace we need is With God**
- **Thus God humbled himself and stepped into the world** in the manger not to bring outward, physical peace, but **instead to bring something much deeper, much more profound, and much more necessary for each of us – Peace with God!**
  - **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:3-5)
  - Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**, <sup>2</sup> 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 ... <sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:1-8)
  - **Christ came, first and foremost, to die for our sins** ... His message is not some hoped for, fantasy ‘peace on earth’, or even some Christmas Card sentiment on ‘finding peace within’ – rather it is a sober acknowledgement that we are each messed up, that we have all hated others, hated ourselves, and even more damning, hated God – and that his son came in that manger to die for our sins, and to grant us what we in ourselves could never earn – **peace with God**
  - **Why did Jesus not bring peace by wiping out evil?** – because if he did he would **not only have killed all the Romans, but all the Jews and all the religious leaders as well!** Everyone who has rebelled against God will one day be cast out into the outer darkness away from God, thrown into the lake of fire, ... And since **we have all rebelled you and I would be with them** – And so God first **sent his some as a ransom for sin**. It is his mercy alone that has not yet wiped out all sin but has instead given us each time to turn and be saved!

▪ **Peace That Surpasses Understanding**

- To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: <sup>2</sup> **Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.** <sup>3</sup> His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup> Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (II Peter 1:1-4)
- <sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And **the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** <sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the **God of peace will be with you.** (Philippians 4:4-9)
- **This Christmas:**
  - The angel said to call his name Jesus because he **would save his people from their sins** – Have you come and knelt at the manger, and the Cross, confessing your sins that you might be saved – **that you might have Peace with God**
  - If you have, do you still **carry your sins around with you**, bearing the burden and guilt of sin? This Christmas bring those to Christ, lay your burdens at his feet, and **let his peace that surpasses understanding fill you anew**
  - **Are you fearful of the future**, not knowing what this world will bring next, not knowing what you will mess up next ... Don't be anxious, but in **prayer and supplication** bring those fear and concerns to God so **His peace can guard your heart and mind**
  - **As you go – this week – think on these things** – think on all that Christ has done – and as you meditate on Him the **God of Peace will be with you.**
- **Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.** (II Thessalonians 3:16)