

The Star – A Journey to Peace
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We are in a sermon series entitled The Star: A Journey to Christmas. Today I am speaking on A Journey to Peace.

I think it's safe to say that everyone wants to have peace in their lives. But some of us look for peace in all the wrong places. We think money or talents or things or people will bring us peace. But the truth is there is only one way to peace.

When the angels announced the birth of Jesus, they said in Luke 1:14

Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, goodwill toward men!

Today we're going to see that peace is only found in Jesus Christ.

When most people think of peace, they think of the absence of hardship, trouble, conflict or disagreement. But the Christmas story shows us people who had peace in the midst of hardship, trouble, violence and fear!

The biblical word for peace is shalom – which means quietness, calmness, success, health, and safety.

- Peace is having inner calm in spite of conflict.
- Peace is having inner tranquility despite other's hostility.
- Peace is being at rest in spite of the mess.

God wants us to experience peace no matter what is going on around us. This peace was promised by Jesus in John 14:27-

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Peace that Jesus gives is not the absence of trouble, but is rather the confidence that He is there with you always. But we must pursue peace and resist fear and a troubled heart. The word troubled here literally means agitated or stirred up. Trouble is like the agitator on your washing machine – it keeps things stirred up. It can cause you to lose your peace. Jesus gives us peace that works even when things are all stirred up. And Jesus does more than give peace to us...

1- Jesus is our Peace!

Peace is not just a feeling or a state of being. Peace is a person. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

By sending His Son, God sent peace into the world. Ephesians 2:13-14 says:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace.

Peace is not something you obtain apart from Jesus Christ! He is our peace!
 Whatever pain you are facing – you can find peace in Christ.
 Whatever burden is weighing you down – you can find peace in Christ.
 Whatever stress you feel – you can find peace in Christ.

2- God gives peace at all times!

How do you picture the night Jesus was born? So many images and songs focus on a picture of “silent night”—a peaceful moment when all was calm and bright. But if such a moment occurred on that first Christmas, it was probably a very fleeting moment.

The city of Bethlehem was overflowing with hordes of people who had arrived after many dusty miles on rough, dangerous roads. Mary gave birth in a barn where animals were kept. Visitors started arriving to visit the new baby within hours of His birth. Then King Herod was in angry pursuit. There was noise and pain and confusion and fear that first Christmas. Yet there was joy and peace in the midst of it all.

You see – the journey to peace is not separated from the reality of life. It’s a journey of peace in the midst of life. 2 Thessalonians 3:16 says:

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

God can give us peace no matter what we are going through! The disciples of Christ understood this – they knew Jesus had a different peace than they had. They had seen him sleep through a raging storm while they were afraid. The story is found in Mark 4:35-41.

On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

They realized He was different – they realized the peace He had was different from theirs and Jesus promised to give them that very peace.

SO, HOW DO WE EXPERIENCE THIS PEACE?

Isaiah 26:3 says:

You will keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.

Two keys to peace are faith and keeping our mind stayed on the Lord. We see this also in Romans 15:13

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.

Joy and peace are the result of faith. If you don't trust God, you will have no peace or joy! God wants us to trust Him with our lives. This can only happen when we have an accurate perception of who God is. We must keep our mind stayed on these facts – that He is good and He always works all things out for our good. God will give us peace in all things. That excludes nothing! Peace only comes when we can trust God in all things. Even in the midst of our storms. Lack of peace reveals lack of faith!

You see, having Jesus on board does not prevent storms! Many Christians wrongly think storms are only for unbelievers. That's not true. The disciples were doing what Jesus told them to do when they got into this storm. You can be in the very center of the will of God, and be going through a hurricane of all kind of troubles.

No one has a life without storms.

There are times when things just don't make sense.

Times when your problems seem so big and your faith seems so small.

Times where you feel swamped and afraid that you are going under.

Our storms can be a financial loss, a business crisis, a relationship problem, a storm of illness. Storms come to us all. When the storms come they can bring emotions of fear, anger, frustration, and uncertainty. What brings us peace is knowing that no matter how bad things get, we have Jesus on board.

What we need to do is call on Jesus as soon as we see the storm coming, not when we start sinking. The disciples did what many of us do. They had the same tendency toward self-reliance. Let's face the storm alone, let's row harder, let's wait until we're about to go under, then let's call on Jesus. That's what I tend to do – row harder, bail faster – get a book on storms and try to figure it out in my head. Then when I'm going down for the third time I cry out– HELP!

Jesus was there in the boat all along. The disciples could have gone to Him when they saw the storm approaching and say – “Lord, how do you want us to handle this?”

Instead they waited and tried to go it alone. Then, when it was almost too late – they went to the Lord for help. That’s what many of us do: we wait until the last possible moment before we call on the Lord. “I’ve tried everything else; all I can do now is pray.” Prayer is like the final SOS when we’re about to go under. We expect God to swoop down and save us at the last moment.

Fortunately, God is gracious and does show up during times of need. However, His desire is for prayer to be more than a flare shot up at the last minute. We need to change that and start calling on Him at the first sign of trouble. What does this have to do with peace? Peace is a result of prayer.

Now, prayer does not always have to be a 3-hour quiet time that starts at 5 AM. In this story the disciples’ prayed 1 sentence: “Jesus, don’t you care?” Have you ever prayed that prayer? I have. “Jesus don’t you care about this storm? Don’t you care about what we’re going through? Don’t you care that all we did was obey you in taking this job or marrying this person or starting this church and look at what’s happening. This is not what I expected. Don’t you care?”

We’ve got to be careful not to turn on God when we are in a storm. The middle of a storm is not the time to turn on God; it’s the time to turn to God. You see, storms reveal our view of God.

Oh, I can praise Him when the sun is shining and the wind is gently blowing and the waves are calm. I can trust Him when the job is going good and the marriage is happy and the kids are obeying and the bills are paid. But many times we are like the disciples and when things get tough, we say, “God just doesn’t care about us. We’re doing the best we can and yet we’re sinking and He’s doing nothing about it.”

Storms reveal our level of trust in the Lord. If you can’t look the darkest storm in the face and not rail against God, or blame God – your view of God still needs some work.

My point is – your attitude during storms will affect how you come through them. His peace is given when we trust Him and praise Him no matter what!
1 Peter 5:7 says:

Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

Throw all your worries and fears on Him! He cares, He will handle it.

When I think of peace, I am often reminded of the well-known hymn “It Is Well with My Soul.”

The old song is loved by so many because of its message that portrays such strength and steadfast trust. But the song has also become famous and more revered for the story behind the words.

Horatio Spafford was a businessman in Chicago in 1873. He went through tough times like losing property in the Great Chicago fire and losing one child to scarlet fever. Later, he sent his wife and 4 daughters ahead of him on a ship to Europe. While crossing the Atlantic, the ship sank, and all four of Spafford's children died. He got a message from his wife that she alone had survived, and he left on the next available ship to go and meet her.

During his journey, near the place his daughters had died, Spafford penned the words to the song.

“When peace like a river attendeth my way / When sorrows like sea billows roll / Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say / It is well, it is well with my soul.”

The painful circumstances he faced make the lyrics even more powerful. The words were not written by someone who was enjoying an easy life but by one who found peace—deep, authentic peace—in the midst of heartache.

As the hymn so beautifully captures, this journey of peace is not immune from those things. In fact, they are central to the story. On this journey, we learn that peace is not the absence of trouble but rather the presence of God. Colossians 3:15 says:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

If peace does not rule our hearts – something will take its place.

What will that something be? A lack of peace.

If the peace of Christ does not rule our hearts, the worries of Satan will.

If the peace of Christ does not rule our hearts, the fears of Satan will.

If the peace of Christ does not rule our hearts, the lies of Satan will.

3- Peace is our protector!

Philippians 4:6-7 says:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Peace will guard our hearts and our minds!

Peace is like a band of soldiers standing watch to protect you.

Peace keeps out worry, fear, and anxiety.

Notice that peace surpasses, or goes beyond, our understanding.
 You will have no peace if you live by your own understanding.
 Your own understanding will not get you through job loss or financial difficulties.
 You need something more. Your own understanding will not get you through
 family problems or a spouse leaving you. You need something more.

Your own understanding will not get you through medical problems or the loss of
 a loved one. You need something more. That something more is the peace of God
 that passes understanding. The Bible says we receive that peace when we pray
 and praise instead of being worried and afraid.

I remember our first service at the YMCA. It was on Palm Sunday, 2002. We were
 all excited about moving from the Krause's house to the Y. We were getting ready
 to have our first big outreach on the next Sunday, which was Easter. We spent
 thousands of dollars getting ready, buying equipment and sending a mailing to
 the community.

We were getting ready to start the service and noticed a YMCA employee and
 some friends were in the weight room working out. We asked them to stop since
 we were getting ready to start church. They got an attitude and called the
 manager. He got on the phone very angry and said he did not want us to meet
 there anymore.

Here we were - faced with the possibility of the first service at the Y also being the
 last service at the Y. All this happened right before the service began. We felt like
 we had been kicked in the stomach. Only Deb and I and a couple of others knew
 about it.

We were faced with a choice.
 Either let it affect our attitude or press through and offer up a sacrifice of praise.
 Either let it get us down or lead us to lift Jesus up.

We did the latter – we made the choice to rejoice. We pressed through and
 worshipped not knowing whether or not we would have a place to meet the next
 week. We worshipped the God who is worthy of praise no matter where we meet.
 And you know what happened? In the middle of praise and worship a peace
 flooded my heart. I just knew everything was going to be all right. And you know
 what? It was.

I called the manager the next day and he was very apologetic. He said, "I'm sorry, I
 don't know what got into me. I still want you to meet here." And we met there for a
 year and grew from 30 people to 100.

I believe a breakthrough happened when we chose to praise in the storm. It
 released the peace of God into our hearts and it released the power of God into a
 difficult circumstance. Peace comes when we praise in the midst of a storm.

Have you ever noticed in the Bible that Jesus never got overwhelmed by anything, or fearful or worried? He was not afraid of this storm. Why? He knew His purpose – He knew His death would take place on a cross, not on a boat in the middle of a storm. So, He had peace in the midst of the storm.

Now here's an important point – you've got to get this:
 Sometimes God calms the storm; sometimes He calms you.
 Sometimes Jesus says "Peace! Be still!" to the storm and it stops.
 Sometimes He lets the storm rage and says "Peace! Be still!" to you.
 Either way – you get peace.

God wants us to experience peace, even in the midst of the storm. We've got to come to the place of knowing the heart of God so well that we know we will come out on the other side of the storm.

The disciples feared the storm needlessly because they did not trust the Word of the Lord. If they had just thought for a moment, they would have remembered that He had said, "Let's go to the other side." He didn't say, "Let us go out to the middle of the lake and be drowned."

They should have known the storm could do them no harm because Jesus was on board! He said we're going across, so we're going across.
 Would they have made it? Yes.
 Will you make it? Yes.

God has a plan for us – a future and a hope for us. If Jesus said we're going to the other side – bank on it – the boat's not going down – we're going through to the other side. We can trust God that even when we get into storms He will bring good out of it! No matter what's rocking your boat - No matter what storm are you going through – whether it's a financial difficulty or a health problem or a family problem - Even if you feel like the circumstances of life are tossing you back and forth like a tiny toy boat in a big raging ocean.

Maybe it feels like God is asleep or He doesn't care. And the enemy's saying, "You're going under! You're not gonna make it!"

You need to speak to yourself and to your storm and speak to Satan–
 "I'm going through this problem! I'm not going down.
 I'm going through this storm. I will not drown.
 I've got a promise from God and I'm not turning back!
 No matter how big the storm gets, My God is always bigger.
 So, I will praise Him in the storm!"

Some of you are in storms that seem like they'll never end and I'm here to tell you there is no peace without the Prince of Peace. You've tried everything to try to find peace and rest, but nothing seems to help. That's because there is no peace without the Prince of Peace. Receive His peace by receiving His salvation today!