

INFINITE DESCENT, PART 2: THE GIFT OF PEACE

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The holiday season is the season where peace becomes even more of a central theme of our desires. Students look forward to Christmas break for relief from their studies, parent's look forward to it so that they might enjoy their kids without the burden of their daily schedules, and employees look forward to it because it brings a couple extra days of rest to our already busy lives.

The things we love most about vacations and holidays are not so much the destinations or the activities, but instead it is the pause. This feeling of peace, a relief of expectation, and anxiety.

While we all want peace on earth in terms of global hostility, don't we also want to have a peace in our own hearts? Peace from disappointment. The promise of true contentment.

So this morning we are going to look at the story of Jesus birth, but we are going to do so through the lens of peace. What I want us to see today is that **peace is only possible through the work and message of Jesus Christ**. We are going to see this as we look at three portraits of peace: the birth of peace, the work of peace and the message of peace. Let's pray.

We are going to open with the story of Jesus' birth but in seeing the birth of Jesus we are also going to be seeing something else: **The Birth of Peace**. Read together, **Luke 2:1-14**.

And there it is. Peace among those with whom God is pleased. Here we see this announcement of God's forever King, and along with that comes the spontaneous worship of the angels praising God for the coming of peace on earth. This is an echo of what we saw last week when John shared with us Isaiah 9. Where speaking of the coming of Christ the prophet prophesies saying, **Isaiah 9:6-7a**.

This is where we get our annual promotion for peace on earth. It is a deeply human longing with a wonderfully divine provision.

Peace is a big deal in the Christian life. It's one of the fruits of the spirit. It's a message we put embroidered on our Bible covers, bookmarks, and coffee mugs.

But if we really want to have peace shouldn't we be able to ask ourselves the question of where this peace came from? Because the proclamation of peace in Luke 2 stands at odds with much of what the Bible says about those who live on earth. Look at what Paul says in **Rom. 8:6-8**. Do you feel the tension of these two texts: Luke 2, Jesus is born, peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased, Romans 8, no one pleases God.

In this equation we find ourselves on the outside of the peace of Jesus. Right now we live in a tumultuous time in regards to peace. Though there are no major international wars going on there are currently over 27 million armed military personnel around our world. There is an international atrocity happening in Aleppo right now, with nearly 20 thousand men, women and children, fleeing violent and offensive military aggression.

The outrage surrounding this event isn't so much that it is happening, but that the western world is turning a blind eye to it. Acting as if it isn't happening. While we pray for peace in an area torn apart by violence we must realize what this issue exposes about our own hearts.

So again I must ask us this Christmas season, where does the peace proclaimed at the Messiah's birth show up in your life? Maybe an easier question is where doesn't it show up? We cannot afford to turn a blind eye to our own hearts. One of the most scathing rebukes of false prophets in the Old Testament is seen in **Jeremiah 6:14**.

Romans 12:3 calls you to not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but think with sober judgment. Seven times in the New Testament we see calls to be sober-minded. Calls to really and honestly address the state of our hearts. But how frequently do we do this?

Do we proclaim peace when there is no peace? Have we fallen to an Aleppo in our own hearts? Keenly aware that something is drastically wrong, but too worried to look soberly at the true war crime in our soul. The crime which James says causes fights and quarrels among us. The warring of passions of sin which lies deep in our veins.

One author commented on the social status of a particular culture in America. One whose life is typified by poor education, poor health, and poor economic standing. This group has been the target of numerous economic research papers, social aid, and media attention, yet the problems still remain unchanged. The author then comments on why it is so hard to address these issues and bring real change to these people saying, "Most important, they're mean about it. They will hesitate to open their lives up to other for the simple reason that they don't wish to be judged."

Isn't that us? Perhaps our inability to find peace even in our own hearts stems from a fear of being judged even by us. A fear that if we can find something wrong, so can everyone else. An uneasiness that we would realize we are not ok.

But what if I told you we don't have to be anxious of this introspection? What if I told you that the proclamation of the angels pushes us towards true peace? Because what we need to realize is that by gazing at this babe in a manger with true faith, we are allowed to see ourselves rightly and with great sobriety.

But in order to see this we have to step back from the Christmas story for a second. We will return to the shepherds in a moment but if we are going to bridge the infinite distance between the peace of God and the position of man, we must first look at the work which accomplished this. This is our second picture of peace tonight: **The Work of Peace.**

We are going to fast forward 60 years from the night the shepherds were startled out of their slumber, and look at how the author of Hebrews deals with this issue of examination. Look with me at **Hebrews 4:12**. We love this verse don't we. We love knowing that God's word is living, that it helps us, assists us, speaks to us. But let's not stop at this verse. Let's read the following verse: **Hebrews 4:13**. We all want our doctors to be the best in their field, and this would bring any sick person peace. But we should never forget that the same doctor we look to for healing is the same doctor who wields the knife.

God's word is living and active and it exists to strip of us all our comfort and protective tendencies so that we might be laid naked and exposed before the judge.

We don't like to be judged or examined do we? But we realize in our life we all pass through this phase of examination so that one day we can be in a position where we are the ones doing the examining. I always think of this when my wife and I watch the Food Network. On these cooking competitions we see amateur chefs performing and being judged by a panel of professional chefs. This is a normal level of tension and judgment. But what I love is when the tables are turned and it is the professional chef-judges who are competing and being judged. And we like it because the tension is heightened right? It's more dramatic.

Well the tension that Jesus experienced in this inversion when he was born was both scandalous and beneficial. Remember that last awkward verse we read in Hebrews? Well let's look at it again and note what happens immediately after it: **Hebrews 4:14-16**.

Jesus' incarnation is a benefit to those who are being judged because Jesus was judged like us. He was tempted as we were, and remained sinless. Though he was judged with us he was not judged as us. For Hebrews goes on to say that Jesus acted as our great High Priest. He was distinct from us since he played a unique role for us.

Look at how this passage continues: **Hebrews 5:1-5**. No one accepts this honor...

If we want true peace we must see the humiliation of this text.

We like to build up the humble story of Jesus birth. We see this every year, in churches across the world. And rightfully so. We see a King born into straw and stubble, laid in the feeding trough of swine. We step outside the Biblical details and we create compelling back stories of Mary and Joseph being turned away by a greedy inn keeper, we focus on the unsanitary conditions of the stable, the lonely isolation of the night, the stench and status of the visiting shepherds.

But if the greatest scandal in Bethlehem is a king being born into a manger, then we have exposed our infinitely flawed view of God.

The infinite descent of Christmas wasn't the location or condition of the birth of Christ, but the simple reality of the incarnation of Christ. That the immovable and unchanging God became a man. That the eternal Son of God who knew only

triune existence at its best willingly accepted to live like us in our worst. In our limited and weakened state.

Jesus could have been born in the finest palace of men and carried on the shoulders of heralds to the nations and the staggering humility of his birth would be the same. Here's why:

In his eternal existence Jesus was never judged. The weight and nerves you have when you walk into your work evaluation, or into a court room, exam room or even a fight with your spouse, Jesus never knew that. He only knew the good pleasure of his Father.

As Hebrews said, he was appointed as a different priest. Greek Mythology provides stories of gods gone wild, coming to earth and taking on flesh so that they might have some sort of epic spring break trip. Jesus came to earth not to enjoy its beauty but to bear its sin.

We may only have peace with God because Jesus was examined in our place. Jesus walked on the earth as both God and Man. Fully divine, fully human. The impulses and urges you feel he felt. The burden and weight of sin was as real to him as it was to us, yet he faced it without a safety net. He was the security, he was the salvation.

He bore the potential of severing the world's most intimate relationship when he took on the world's most limited form. That of man. And by his obedience, perfect, holy and true, we have been saved. In this life we experience relief from sin because our High Priest refused it. He refused to fall so that those who had might be raised with him. He had to plead for the first time with his father in weakness and pain, so that those born in weakness and pain might know strength and peace.

The only way to find peace with God is to realize that Jesus was the first man to fully please God. He met the righteous demands for perfection and the just demands for the death of sin. The peace of Christmas is seen in this: **Colossians 1:19-20**. We do not find peace when we avoid judgment, but when we find ourselves judged in Jesus.

Now we can look ourselves soberly because we have already been exposed, judged and tried in Christ. And if we are in Christ we can face our deepest sins, doubts and fears in the light of life.

This is our last picture of peace: **The Message of Peace**.

Knowing what we now know, we can return to the shepherds. We can hear the message of the angels and we can understand with greater clarity what it means for there to be peace on earth. But now I want to look at the response of the shepherds: **Luke 2:15-20**.

Now there is something very subtle that I want us to see in this text. I want us to see what captivated the people in this scene. For let's not forget what had just happened. Shepherds were sitting in a field at night and all of a sudden an angel appeared, the glory of the lord lit up the night, a heavenly word was spoken to them, and then a multitude of angels appeared and sang praises.

Do you know what a normal human would take away from this? Do you know what the Christian publishing world would take away from this? They would take the sensationalism. We would want to communicate the lights, sounds and privileged event which was just seen. The shepherds would be interviewed, recorded, and examined so that we might find out the exact type of light which shone from heaven, the appearance of the angels. You don't need to look long at our books, testimonies, or Christian media to see that often we become driven to find something truly captivating in the mysterious things of Christianity.

Is this you? Saying that God would be more attractive to you if he would just do "this." If God would prove himself in this way. If I could just see "that." Longing for something special, something, miraculous, something extraordinary.

But did you see what captivated people here? Look at **Luke 2:17-18, 20**. The shepherds didn't share with the people the phenomenon of their angelic experience, the people at the stable were not shocked at the supernatural light which shone, the men didn't leave praising God that they had heard the angelic choir. What captivated, what compelled, what brought instant and spontaneous worship was the message of the angels.

Fear not for I bring you good news of great joy for all people. That today in the town of Bethlehem is born for you a Savior, he is Christ the Lord, this will be a sign for you, you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

The most compelling aspect of Christianity is the message of peace through Jesus Christ. We need nothing else. If you are longing for something more you don't know the Jesus who became something less.

The miracle in the manger is twofold, and this is what I want to leave us with this Christmas season. The first miracle is that Christ was born, and that he went on to live as our substitute, to bear our judgment so that we might be found in him. And the second miracle is this: that we have been invited to see him.

Peace is offered. Peace is freely presented. And you will never find that peace in the security of the world, the acceptance of a loved one, or in the position of power. You will not even find that peace in the revelation of angelic messengers, but I stand here today offering you something better: the angelic message. Come and hear the message of peace, come and hear the message of forgiveness, come and hear the message freely and openly made known.

Come and see this King. Come and believe in him. Come and worship, Come and worship, worship Christ the newborn king.