

“Peace”

Pastor Sam Richards

8 December 2024

Texts: Luke 2:13-14; Philippians 4:4-7

[Introductory Notes: **And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, goodwill toward men.”** Variant endings read **on whom He sees fit to bestow His grace, and on earth peace among men of goodwill**¹ (some better manuscripts attest), or **peace to those on whom his favor rests** (NIV)

“Strange Prophecy! if all the screams
Of all the men that since have died
To realize war’s kingly dreams
Had risen at once in one vast tide,
The choral song of that vast multitude
Had been o’erpowered and lost amid the uproar rude.”

“The Angels sang indeed of such an *ultimate* Peace; but also of “the peace which passeth understanding;” of that peace whereof Christ said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you.” See [Proverbs 3:17](#), on which the Book of Zohar remarks that it means peace in heaven and on earth, and in this world and the next. As regards earthly peace He himself said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword,” [Matthew 10:34](#); [Luke 12:51](#). See this contrast magnificently shadowed forth in [Isaiah 9:5](#)” —Cambridge Bible Commentary

John Gill writes on verse 14:

he (Jesus) is the author of peace between God and elect sinners, who, through the fall, are at enmity against, God, and enemies in their minds by wicked works unto him; nor can they make their peace with God; they know not the way of it; nor are they disposed to it; nor can they approach to God to treat with him about terms of peace; nor can they do those things that will make their peace with God, as satisfying his justice, and fulfilling his law: Christ only is their peace maker; he only is fit for it, being God and man in one person, and so *a daysman* that can lay his hands on both, and has a concern in each, in things pertaining to God, and to make reconciliation for the sins of the people: he only is able to do it, and he has

¹ Good will (of God) among men. ἐν ὑψίστοις, in the highest places, proper abode of Him who is repeatedly in these early chapters called “the Highest”. The thought in 1 echoes a sentiment in the Psalter of Solomon ([Luke 18:11](#)), μέγας ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν καὶ ἐνδοξος ἐν ὑψίστοις.—εὐδοκίας is a gen. of quality, limiting ἀνθρώποις = those men who are the objects of the Divine εὐδοκία. They may or may not be all men, but the intention is not to assert that God’s good pleasure rests on all. J. Weiss in Meyer says = τοῖς ἐκλεκτοῖς. —[Expositor’s Greek Testament](#)

done it by the blood of his cross; and a very excellent peace it is he has made: it is made upon the most honorable terms, to the satisfaction of justice, and the magnifying of the law of God; and is therefore a lasting one, and attended with many blessings, such as freedom of access to God, and a right to all the privileges of his house; and the news of it are glad tidings of good things: and those angels that first brought the tidings of it, may be truly called, as some of the angels are by the Jews (t), "angels of peace".

Moreover, Christ may be said to be "peace", because he is the donor of all true solid peace and real prosperity, both external, which his people have in the world, and with each other; and internal, which they have in their own breasts, through believing in him, and attending on his ordinances; and eternal, which they shall have for ever with him in the world to come. And now Christ being the peace on earth, is owing to will towards men; that is, to the free favour, good will, and pleasure of God towards chosen men in Christ Jesus: that Christ was on earth as the peacemaker, or giver, was owing to God's good will; not to angels, for good angels needed him not as such; and the angels that sinned were not spared, nor was a Saviour provided for them; but to men, and not to all men; for though all men share in the providential goodness of God, yet not in his special good will, free grace, and favor: but to elect men, to whom a child was born, and a Son given, even the Prince of Peace: it was from God's good will to these persons, whom he loved with an everlasting love in Christ, laid up goodness for them in him, blessed them with all spiritual blessings in him, and made a covenant with him for them; that he provided and appointed his son to be the Saviour and peace maker; that he sent him into this world to be the propitiation for sin; and that he spared him not, but delivered him up into the hands of men, justice, and death, in order to make peace for them.

Matthew Poole adds: "To bring in this, and all other peace in its train, was the prime errand of the Saviour to this earth, and, along with it, Heaven's whole "good will to men"—the divine complacency on a new footing—descends to rest upon men, as upon the Son Himself, in whom God is "well-pleased." (Mt 3:17, the same word as here.)" Commentary on Luke 4:14]

+++

“PEACE”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, goodwill toward men.” Variant endings read **on whom**

He sees fit to bestow His grace, and on earth peace among men of goodwill² (some better manuscripts attest), or **peace to those on whom his favor rests** (NIV)

Now I find two things conjoined here: the glory due God and peace on earth. The purpose and perhaps motive of the second (**peace on earth**) is found in the first (**Glory to God in the highest**). Glory to God, honor and praise due Him are the main event behind creation, history and redemption. It is this deference that Job maintains, howsoever shabbily in the cosmic context between God and Satan that shaped the circumstances of Job's life mostly for the worse despite the culmination in reward. There are those who think that the conclusion to Job must be an addition, an amendment. I am uncertain as to why they would insist on such a negative, dark ending. Restoration is superior to cruelty in so many ways. But, and this is my main point, praise and peace are essentially conjoined. It is as if those who are in the way of praise find peace! And the peace they find in praising is a heavenly word.

I propose to preach on the gospel of peace that Luke 2:13-14 declares. It is timely. There was an earthquake off the coast of northern California recently—40 miles offshore and 7-8 miles deep and the shock waves were widely registered. Great swaths of our eastern seaboard have been ravaged by severe hurricanes—bringing disruption, death and natural devastation. The magnetic field of the sun inverted, too. Syria is falling, Assad has fled and the threat of nuclear war hovers over the ongoing conflicts in our world. All these disturbances, and the suddenness of them disrupt our peace. Yes, a word on peace is timely whether the causes are natural, or self-inflicted wounds of a conflicted world order.

I wish to begin by celebrating the liberty we have to meet and worship relatively free from the fear of state intrusion—worshippers being arrested, services being disrupted. There has been an alarming rise in state hostility to things Christian (the surveillance of churches particularly around the pro-life issues) and intimidation tactics by supposedly counter-terrorists—who, ironically, are terrorizing American Christians for political reasons. We don't, presently, have to guard our doors against such intrusions, people are rarely being falsely charged, arrested, imprisoned, fined or shot (Ruby Ridge and Waco—where David Koresh's compound, Ranch Davidian) was obliterated excepted). We worship in relative peace and serenity, expounding the word and singing as loudly as we please. We should be grateful for all that freedom.

We share freely in the sacred festival called the Lord's Supper and that great peace-making between God and man is openly lifted up. And yet, as Charles Spurgeon notes in his audience analysis to the sermon, "The Peace of God" (1878), not all who come to the table are entirely at peace. They bring with them rifts, jars and disquietude. Disordered families, bad even evil tempers disturb our peace continuously. And some have festered for long stretches of time. Our relationships can run riotous and our loves run amok. We take offense, resentments over trifling matters, like dust in our eyes, agitate us . . . even cause great storms of distress! Moments of

² Good will (of God) among men. ἐν ὑψίστοις, in the highest places, proper abode of Him who is repeatedly in these early chapters called "the Highest". The thought in 1 echoes a sentiment in the Psalter of Solomon ([Luke 18:11](#)), μέγας ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν καὶ ἐνδοξος ἐν ὑψίστοις.—εὐδοκίας is a gen. of quality, limiting ἀνθρώποις = those men who are the objects of the Divine εὐδοκία. They may or may not be all men, but the intention is not to assert that God's good pleasure rests on all. J. Weiss in Meyer says = τοῖς ἐκλεκτοῖς. —[Expositor's Greek Testament](#)

calm and serenity like a stilled sea, smooth and glassy waters, are susceptible to even a baby's breath of disturbance. And there we are, ruffled and offended. And we often reflect on how poorly we have handled a delicate moment. Overly sensitive, triggered preemptively. Why? Could it be we are not walking near to God? That we have slipped from our true standing, forgiven and reconciled to God, and our peace has departed. Perhaps our hearts are troubled and we don't know exactly why—and may never know—and our peace is gone.

In Philippians 4:7 Paul writes: **And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.** That is quite the promise! And we find that this result, **the peace of God**, is consequent to a number or pre-requisites laid down for believers:

1. That we are always rejoicing. (v.4)
2. That we are moderate in worldly engagements. (v.5)
3. That we are carefree (**anxious for nothing**) letting our requests be made known through grateful supplications/prayers to God. (v.6)
4. That we remain prayerful, rooted and grounded in God. (v.6)

These pre-requisites amount to a centering, or re-centering of our life in God! We should remember that this letter was written by Paul to **all the saints which are in Christ Jesus.** *The saints are the “separated, or holy ones of God” in Christ Jesus.* They are separated from the profane world and separated to God, that is reserved for God, His sue and service. They are further separated from evil as those endeavoring to live morally pure and holy lives; they are both dedicated and available for divine service. Paul, in singling out **bishops and deacons**, intends for the whole church, leaders and members, to receive this message! Do these things and the **peace of God** will guard, garrison, protect **your hearts and minds**. Here is a second duality in this passage: **glory of God/peace on earth** is joined here by heart and mind! They are inseparable, and intertwined.

This **peace of God** is an immense, unspeakable privilege. It is the result of rejoicing, moderation in things of this world, being carefree and gratefully prayerful as those who are supremely centered in God. This **peace** implies, peace of conscience, an actual peace with God, that actualizers through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. *It is something God does, a heavenly originated intervention! It imputes righteousness, includes reconciliation, forgiven and restoration to divine favor—which is to say, it is spiritually speaking a really big deal.* It is justification received by faith and experienced by those forgiven; and that experience must be strong, vivid and real! It is a perfect peace based on the annihilation of sin—your sins are gone, blotted out, cast away entirely (as far as the east is from the west). Our transgressions are no longer remembered, they are finished removed, cancelled. In the ancient idiom of the scapegoat, our iniquities have been loaded on to Christ and carried off to final dissipation in the wasteland. *The cause of the offense having been removed, full compensation of the injured law of God has been made and at the same time the justice of God has been upheld! Peace is what follows this profound actual reconciliation—achieved by God and by His grace applied to us.* Present circumstances to the contrary, notably presidential pardons, the blood of Jesus achieves full pardon, universal and complete pardon for those who believe, who are in Christ.

So we know that Jesus stood as our Substitute.
Jesus bore what was due to vindicate God's law.

And, as a result we are clear, free!
 This Substitute could in no way be inadequate—or else why send Him?
 What would this Substitute have accomplished if He did not save those for
 whom He died?
 Either Christ was the chastisement of our peace, and by His stripes we were
 healed, or our gospel is emptied of revelatory content.

“Jesus was punish’d in my stead,
 Without the gate my Surety bled
 To expiate my stain:
 On earth the Godhead deign’d to dwell,
 And made of infinite avail
 The sufferings of the man.
 “And was he for such rebels given?
 He was; the Incarnate King of Heaven
 Did for his foes expire:
 Amazed, O earth, the tidings hear;
 He bore, that we might never bear
 His Father’s righteous ire.”

J. Milton

“Here the soul rests at the foot of the cross it finds a peace it never could have found elsewhere. . . . There take your fill of peace, for by this sacrifice a covenant of peace is now established between you and your God, and it is sacred by atoning blood.”

—C. H. Spurgeon

There is a second form of the peace of God--besides that framed by salvation history and it consists of a change in the little kingdom within. When we know that we know we are forgiven/utterly saved, a sudden and delightful change occurs within.

A picture of the inner state of fallen man.

The “cage of beasts” that we used to house for a heart, where all is at war, reading, tearing and devouring—because we are so out of order—is pacified. We were disordered with God, with the universe and with ourselves. The cogs and wheels of our inner machinery were imbalanced, out of synch—sometimes with dreadful grinding, shrieks and clatter, clanging, knocking—the stroke’s off, misfiring. . . and in this chaotic place, our passions usurp us, hijack us, refusing to be ruled by reason. They demand to take the reins, to commandeer the wheel, and our disabled reason rejects the guidance of knowledge *communicated by God in His word*, runs full tilt after a depraved imagination, or the delusions thereof and demands to be set up as a separated rule power, judging God himself. For the sick mind seeks to clamber up into the critic’s seat as a fixed, murmuring, willful discontent that is eager for sin and hot to pursue transgression! Thus is seated rebellion against God, in an agitated state of confusion spreading bewilderment to all our systems. There is a cruel, internal war raging amongst our mental powers, our animal instincts, spiritual sensibilities and moral faculties. *And this causes fear, distress, unhappiness and despondency.*

There is no cure for this but the redeeming, restrain grace of Jesus Christ!

“O man, you cannot get your heart right, you cannot get your conscience right, you cannot get your understanding right, you cannot bring your various powers to their bearings and make them act in true harmony till first you are right with God. The King must occupy the throne, and then the estate of Mansoul will be duly settled, but till the chief authority has due eminence rebellion and riot will continue. When the Lord breathes peace into a man, and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove to dwell within the soul, then is there quiet: where all was chaos, order appears, the man is created anew, and becomes

a new creature in Christ Jesus; and though rebellious lusts still try to get the mastery, yet there is now a ruling power which keeps the man in order so that within him there is “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.”

Amen.