

Victory of the Lamb – December 23 & 24, 2022 – Christmas List –

Peace – Luke 2:13-24 – Pastor Ben Sadler

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 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. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 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.

On the very first pages of the Bible, there is this strange description of the Paradise of Eden. It says, **Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (Genesis 2:25)** Why would that be the climax of Eden? Why would that be the highest good? Well, what this is saying is that in the beginning the first two humans were fully known by each other and at the same time fully loved. They knew everything thing about each other. There was nothing to hide. And at the same time they were fully pleased with each other.

Not only was that the description of their relationship with each other. That was their relationship with their Creator. The Almighty and Holy God, the Maker of all things, lived among them. Heaven and Earth fully overlapped. Humans walked with God without fear or anything to hide. According to the Scriptures, **This was the way it was supposed to be.**

But then, paradise was lost. And the first piece of evidence that something had gone wrong was that the first humans starting covering themselves. The story says that they sewed fig leaves to cover themselves. Now they had something to hide from each other. They were afraid if they were fully known by each other, they would not be fully loved.

But they didn't just hide themselves from each other. We read, ⁸ **Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8)**

They heard that God was coming into their presence and they instinctively hid from him. Not only did they try to cover themselves up from each other. But now they were trying to hid from God. They were afraid that if God knew who they really were, they would no longer be fully loved and fully accepted by God. **This is NOT the way it was supposed to be.**

And we have been hiding ever since. We don't really want people to get to know the real me because we all have this fear, if people really knew me, then they wouldn't love me. It seems like the more public we make our profile, the more we have to filter what we show the world. And so we put ourselves out in the world on Facebook or Instagram, but we filter ourselves, not just physically, but also morally.

When we describe our day, even to the people we love, we are tempted to curate the narrative. We don't really want our spouse or closest friends to know everything we are thinking. Because we are afraid that if we would be fully known, we would not be fully loved.

Or maybe I could say it this way. Christmas break is often a time when people go to the movies. Now I want you to imagine that all the theaters in our area decided to only play one movie. And this movie was about you. But not the curated and filter view of your life. Not just your successes and your accomplishments. They were going to show everything. Your weak and selfish moments. Your embarrassing failures. Everything you have thought. Everything you have done.

Do you really want all the people in this community, your family and friends to see that movie? No, because you wonder, if I was fully known, would I still be fully loved?

Today we are continuing our sermon series **Christmas List**. And this series is all about the things we want for Christmas that you can't find on Amazon or Target. So we have talked about how we really want things like Hope, Belonging, Joy, and today we are talking about peace. (**Show a picture of the presents with tags from the front of church**). Now, when we think about the word peace, we usually think about the absence of conflict or war or hostility. But when the Biblical authors thought about peace they thought about more than that. In fact, the Hebrew word for Peace is Shalom. This what the word looks like (**Show picture of Shalom**). And the root word for Shalom is shalom (**Show the picture of Shalom**) And Shalom means completeness, to be whole, the way things are supposed to be. In fact, that is how I would describe the word **Peace- The way things are supposed to be**. And according to the Bible, the way things are supposed to be is that we are fully known and fully loved. We are to be able to be naked and without shame. But that is not what we experience. And so here is the question I want to answer today:

How can we experience peace? Or another way to say it, "How can we get things back to the way they are supposed to be?"

And to answer that question, I want to go back to Luke chapter 2, the account of the first Christmas. After Luke describes how Caesar Augustus issued a decree to make a census and how Mary and Joseph were required to return to Bethlehem and after he describes how Jesus was born in humble circumstances and laid in an animal's feeding trough, now Luke takes us to a nearby field.

He says, ⁸ **And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.** ⁹ **An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them... (Luke 2:8-9)** Now, I have been studying and preaching this text for over 12 years, and for the first time in my life, something struck me. Luke describes shepherds, the angel of the Lord, and the Glory of the Lord. There is another time in the Bible where there is a shepherd, an angel of the Lord and the glory of the Lord. Do you know what it is? In the second book of the Bible, the book of Exodus, Moses is a shepherd. And he is visited by the angel of the Lord and the glory of the Lord is revealed to him in the burning bush. At that time, God was about to use that shepherd, Moses, to do something big. He was going to rescue the nation of Israel from slavery.

And now, I think, Luke is mentioning shepherds, the angel of the Lord, and the glory of the Lord to alert us that God is about to do something big again.

But that is not what the shepherds think. Luke says that when the angel of the Lord shows up and the glory of the Lord shines around them, ...**they were terrified. (Luke 2:9)** They want to run. They want to hide. That don't want to be seen by this holy angel because they are afraid that if this holy angel exposes who they really are, they would not be loved, but judged and punished for their selfishness and sin.

But the angel says to them, **"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.** ¹¹ **Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord...**(Luke 2:10-11) The angel doesn't want them to be afraid. He doesn't come to judge them or crush them. He has good news for them that will cause them great joy. A Savior has been born for them. He is the long-awaited Messiah. He is the Lord God almighty. God has once again come to earth to walk with his people just like he did in the paradise of Eden.

The angel goes on to explain how they are to recognize their Savior and their God. **..This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."** (Luke 2:12) Their Savior and their God is a baby. This baby is wrapped in normal baby clothes. And this baby is lying in an animal's feeding trough.

In other words, you can go into the presence of the Almighty God without fear. He is completely approachable. You don't have to fear him. He is a baby. And who is afraid of a baby. He is a lowly and humble baby that is satisfied with an animal's feeding trough for a crib.

It seems like the message of the angel of the Lord was so wonderful, so amazing that heaven itself could not stay silent. Heaven broke open and reunited with earth for at least a moment. A whole army of angels broke into the dimensions of this world, not to judge, not to destroy, but to sing. And this was their song:

¹⁴ **"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."**

Praise and glory and honor and worship to God in the highest places of heaven. Exalt him to the highest honor. Worship him with the highest praise possible because now on earth there is peace. Things are the way they are supposed to be. How could that be possible? How could there be peace? The angels sang that this peace is on those whom his favor rests. Literally, it is on the people with whom God is pleased.

So what does this song mean? God is pleased with is people again. He looks at them and knows everything about them and he is happy with them. And so they are at peace. Things are the way they are supposed to be.

How could this be? How could God look at those shepherds and look at his people and look at us and be happy with us?

Well, let's go back to that idea of the movie theaters playing a movie about your life. Again, imagine that all the movies in our area are playing the movie about you. There are no other movies. And everyone seems to be interested in going. The movie theaters are packed. All the tickets are sold out. And you decide to slip in the back. You want to see what kind of story this movie is going to tell. You want to see how the people are going to react. And so the opening scene begins with a story of a baby born in Bethlehem. This baby grows up to be a man who lives a completely humble and selfless life. He is never selfish, never self-centered, never self-righteous. He always makes the right decisions. He always loves people purely and fully. Then he shows the full extent of his love by giving up his life as a sacrifice to pay the debt for all the world's wrongs. He wins the battle over sin and death and is vindicated in his resurrection. The Heavenly Father looks at him and says, "This is my child, whom I love, with him I'm well pleased."

That's the movie that is played. Now you might be thinking, but that is not about me and my life. But this is what Jesus has done for us. Jesus' life stands as a substitute for our life. Jesus' death pays the debt for us. And so now when the Father looks at us we can be fully known and fully loved. We don't have to hide anymore.

In other words,

We are at peace with God.

God is pleased with us.

Things are the way they are supposed to be.

This was such good news that the shepherds left there to go and see Mary and Joseph and the baby. And after they saw the baby, they were so excited that they told everyone about it. Luke describes it this way: ¹⁶ **So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.** 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. (Luke 2:16-18)**

And I hope that happens to you this weekend. I hope the good news that you are at peace with God will be so exciting so moving that you will tell everyone you know about it. I pray you tell your relatives and friends. I pray you tell your neighbors and co-workers. I pray the peace of God overflows and spreads into every area of your life.

But there is another reaction to this good news. And this is the one I hope we experience right now. Luke says, ¹⁹ **But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)** Mary took in the message of God's love for us and his plan for us and the peace that it brings and she put it in the treasure chest of her heart. She was not going to let it seep out. She was not going to lose it. She was going to ponder it, meditate on it, think about it in her heart.

I think this helps us answer our opening question: **How can we experience peace?**

Ponder the pleasure of God.

God fully sees you and still loves you. He has seen you at your worst. You can't hide from him. He knows it all. And yet because of Jesus, you are without shame. He fully knows you and he fully loves you. He smiles when he looks at you. He is pleased with you. And instead of your sin and selfishness, he sees that story of Jesus. He has watched the movie of your life and as the credits roll, he gives you a standing ovation. That is my son, with him, I'm well pleased. That is my daughter, with her, I'm well pleased.

So, just take moment right now and ponder the pleasure of God. Ponder the idea that God sees you fully and loves you. Ponder the pleasure of God that he smiles on you.

There is a theologian that explains what happens when we receive God's pleasure and his favor and good-will and what it does in our life. He writes: ***If God be at peace with us, all peace results from it: peace of conscience, peace with angels, peace between Jew and Gentile...All the good we have, or hope, is owing to God's good-will; and, if we have the comfort of it, he must have the glory of it.***¹
(Matthew Henry)

Here is what I'm saying. Christmas allows us to experience a slice of paradise as we receive his pleasure. We live in a fallen world and we are fallen people and so we spend so much time hiding and filtering and curating who we are out of fear. We are afraid that if people knew who we really are we would not be fully loved. But God knows who we are and he still loves us. All that has been wrong has been replaced by Jesus. And all that is right will be blessed by Jesus. That is how you experience a piece of paradise. And one day, we will not just get a piece of paradise, but the whole thing. The Bible says that on the Last Day, God will again come down to live with his people. He will resurrect our bodies and resurrect our world. We will again physically walk with God, without shame. But until that day, ponder the pleasure of God. You can come out of hiding. You don't have to run from God. Ponder the pleasure of God because of the prince of peace.

¹ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 1828). Hendrickson.