



+ **YOU**

Winter 2024-25

Looking Forward to Christmas

Sermon Title: Christmas Gives Us the Gift of Peace

To be used with Session 2: Looking Forward to Peace

Scripture: John 1:67-74; 14:26 Romans 5:1; 8:1

Connection with Bible Study: This sermon complements the Bible study “Looking Forward to Peace” by pointing to the reality that our world desperately needs peace. So much of our world is regularly engaged in either armed conflict or ideological strife. Our world is desperate for peace. The truth is that lasting peace doesn’t come through negotiating peace at the conference table. Real peace begins with an acknowledgment that all conflict arises from humanity’s alienation from God. Lasting peace continues with embracing the Christmas gift of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He is the one who has bridged the gap between us and God. Through Him, we now have peace with God.

Introduction:

This Christmas season people all over our land will be singing songs of “peace on earth, good will to men.” But does our world really know what peace is all about? Even now in locations around our world there are nations and people groups at war with one another. Politically and ideologically our nation is currently at war. Since 1900 there have been approximately 267 armed conflicts around the world. [https://www.war-memorial.net/wars_all.asp] Obviously, what our fractured world needs is peace, lasting peace.

In 1863, poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow expressed his despair over the war-torn condition of America. As he listened to the church bells ringing to celebrate Christmas Day, Longfellow lamented that peace seemed to be non-existent due to the armed conflict of the Civil War in his beloved country. Arising from that despair, Longfellow began writing a poem to express his anguish.

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!

Longfellow went on to write,

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!"

[Pastor – you may want to read all the poem but not the last verse at this point in the sermon.]

So, what about it? Is there no hope for peace in our world? We may think so, but God had other plans at Christmas centuries ago!

1. Christmas peace was a part of God's plan from the beginning (Luke 1:67-74).

The biggest problem you and I face is not war in some remote part of the world. It's not the war of words between political parties. It certainly isn't the rivalries of various sports teams that often escalate into something ugly. Our biggest problem is the fact that we are at war with God. In fact, Paul talked about the reality that we were enemies against God (Rom. 5:10). This conflict began in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. With their disobedience, the hostilities began.

Yet even back at the beginning, God had a plan to bring peace into this hostility. That plan centered around the promise of God's Messiah. In Luke 1:67-74 is recorded a magnificent prayer of Zechariah who was the father of John the Baptist. In that prayer Zechariah praised God for His plan to "visit" or come to earth to redeem or rescue His people out of the destruction of war with God. Because of God's great compassion for all of humanity, He shined His light on all living in darkness. The result? In that light we can find our way "into the way of peace."

2. Christmas peace is vastly different from worldly peace (John 14:27).

History is replete with peace treaties between nations at war that have been broken. Even when a peace treaty has held, there can still be much hostility and angry rhetoric between nations. That, however, doesn't hold true for the peace with God that comes to us through His Son Jesus Christ. In John 14:27, Jesus said, 'Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful.'" The peace that Jesus gives to us is vastly different than the peace offered by the world. While it may be a peace that temporarily ends the turmoil, it doesn't necessarily solve all the problems.

The peace that Jesus gives, not only eases the tension between us and God, but it also actually removes the cause of the tension. The cause, of course, is our disobedience toward God. We want things our way and we are not willing to follow God or keep His commands. But through the cross of Jesus Christ the barrier of our sins was removed. Our disobediences were taken away and nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14).

3. Christmas peace brings an astounding result (Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

Earthly peace treaties may bring a cessation to conflict, but they don't necessarily restore a nation's daily life back to normal. Often there is devastation to the infrastructure and the lives of families who have lost loved ones. Time counted in years may be necessary for the peace treaty to do what it is intended to do.

This is not so with God's peace treaty with us in Jesus Christ. Our results are instantaneous, lasting for all of eternity. Romans 5:1 sets forth an astounding result of the peace of Christ in our life: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Justified—right with God, declared not guilty! Romans 8:1 continues this theme: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." No more war! No more hostility! Not even the possibility of hostility and war!

This kind of peace comes only through a relationship of absolute trust in Jesus Christ and His death on our behalf. Peace of this sort can never be achieved by anything we do. Only God can remove the barrier of sin; only God can give to us the gift of life eternal, and it all comes when we admit we were the guilty party – we were sinners in disobedience and open rebellion against God. Each of us needs to respond to God's invitation by accepting Him as our Peacemaker.

Conclusion

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was distraught by the war that had torn the United States apart in the 1860s. But thankfully, he didn't stay in that distraught state. After writing the first six stanzas of his poem "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," he closed with a great crescendo of faith in God's sovereign control over our world and our lives.

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."

God is still in the business of bringing peace on earth and good-will to men. The question is, will you let Him be your peace today?

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