

“Peace on Earth”

Luke 2:14

*“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

Before I begin this message I have a disclaimer to make. I love all things Christmas. I am aware that there are two major pitfalls when it comes to our enjoyment of the Christmas holiday. On one side secularism and consumerism can destroy the Christmas holiday for Christians. Without realizing it we can allow these things to take away everything that is spiritual and truly matters about Christmas. On the other hand, there is the pitfall of over spiritualizing Christmas. There are those who believe everything secular about Christmas is of the devil and should be denounced and avoided like the plague. I seek to rest my enjoyment for Christmas in the middle of these two extremes. We as Christians must never forget that this season is all about the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. However, that does not make all of our other traditions evil or insignificant.

Another thing I've noticed about the Christmas holiday in a post Christian America, is that the meanings of many of our traditions are slowly being changed into something else in order to possess a more universal or secular significance. Today I would like to focus on one small phrase that has seen a significant shift in its meaning over the past hundred years or so. It is a phrase found in the Bible yet its modern meaning is not biblical. It is the phrase "peace on earth". This phrase is found in many of our Christmas hymns and poems.

- Peace on earth and mercy mild God and sinners reconciled (hark the Herald Angels sing)
- In the poem/hymn “I heard the bells on Christmas day” every stanza ends with peace on Earth goodwill to men
- And praise is saying to God the king, and peace to man on earth (oh little town of Bethlehem)

I would like for us to take a look at what this phrase means today and then we will look at what the original meaning of this phrase is in the Scriptures.

I'm going to read an excerpt from an article written by Gillian Brockell

Published in the Washington Post Dec. 24, 2017 about a story often referred to as the "Christmas Truce Miracle". It happened in 1914 during WWI at Christmas time. The article says this.

On a frosty, starlit night, a miracle took place. In 1914, a melody drifted over the darkness of No Man's Land. First "O, Holy Night," then "God Save the King."

Peeking over their trenches for what must have been the first time in weeks, British soldiers were surprised to see Christmas trees lit with candles on the parapets of the enemy's trenches.

Then a shout: "You no shoot, we no shoot!"

The Christmas Truce was a brief, spontaneous cease-fire that spread up and down the Western Front in the first year of World War I. It's also a symbol of the peace on Earth and goodwill toward humans so often lacking not just on the battlefield but in our everyday lives.

Notice if you will the last sentence that I read: "It's also a symbol of the peace on Earth and goodwill toward humans so often lacking not just on the battlefield but in our everyday lives". This story, and there are many others like it, is a great example of the evolution of the phrase "peace on Earth". The phrase has taken on the meaning of a universal peace and harmony between fellow human beings on the earth. Please do not misunderstand me, I love that idea as much as any other person. I even love that idea as it pertains to the Christmas holiday season. There does seem to be a bit more peace and harmony at Christmas time. It seems that most people make more of an effort to relax and get along at Christmas time. I love it. We can really use this moment of peace in our world today. This has been a difficult year. We have seen more division and hostility in America this year than we have seen in a long time. The idea of this type of peace is much greater than its reality. However, it has little to nothing to do with the biblical truth of Christmas.

In fact, the phrase that is often added to peace on earth is not the best translation of the phrase we find in the Bible. We often hear "goodwill toward humans" or "goodwill to men" added to the phrase "peace on earth". That additional phrase is in my opinion not the most accurate

translation of what we see in Luke 2:14. I'm not saying it is heretical or does violence to the original Greek. But, I do not think it is the most accurate in conveying the meaning of that passage. Let's take a moment to look at and exegete Luke 2:14.

We are all familiar with the context of the story. Mary had just given birth to her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths put him in a Manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. An angel appeared to some shepherds and told them "fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

And then suddenly a multitude of heavenly hosts join the angel and begin praising God with this phrase, "*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" This is the ESV translation. The king James translates the phrase "and on earth peace, good will toward men". That is where we get the most common translation, but not necessarily the most accurate. It's actually kind of easy to see based on these translations why one would think it's painting a picture of God being praised in heaven while the earth and all its inhabitants are filled with peace and goodwill toward one another. However, a closer look at the Greek paints a different picture for us.

"Doxa en hupsistos Theo, Kai epi ge eirene, En anthropos eudokia!"

Doxa

This word is [glory](#), and [honor](#). It is the basis for the word '[doxology](#)'. There are other shades in the Greek meaning though. Originally the word referred to an [opinion](#), or [estimation](#). Later it 'doxa' came to mean honor, [fame](#), and [praise](#).

en

A [preposition](#) that can be translated as:

- in
- at
- with
- among

hupsistos

The highest or heights - often meaning [Heaven](#).

Theo

'[God](#)' (its a very straight forward word)

Kai

Simply, the [conjunction](#) 'And'.

epi

Another preposition - upon/on

ge

Earth (as opposed to heaven)

eirene

[Peace](#), similar to the [Hebrew](#) equivalent - [shalom](#). While this word means [national tranquility](#) and freedom from [war](#), it also has a strong spiritual implication of peace between individuals, [harmony](#) and a spiritual [well being](#).

En

(see above)

anthropos

Men, human being ([of either gender](#)), all human beings. The Greek word 'aner' means [manly men](#) as opposed to [human](#) - 'anthropos' has no such [implications](#).

eudokia

The most [interesting](#) and [complex](#) of all the words in this passage - [good will](#). The verb form 'eudokeo' is comes from two Greek words: 'eo' meaning well, and good; and 'dokeo' meaning to consider and think. There are two basic ways which this can be used:

- To think or consider it good to do something
- To take [pleasure](#) or [delight](#) in something or someone

The first usage is common in [legal documents](#) with the stress on the willingness of someone's intentions concerning the good. The second usage can be found in [Matthew 3:17](#) referring to God's delight in His Son.

I purposefully selected the exegesis of a commentator who interprets this passage in a universal manner so that my exegesis could not be accused of being biased. He concludes:

The **noun** form (which is used here) refers to an active good will and good pleasure. In some places this passage has been translated to 'peace on earth towards men of good will' or 'peace on earth, and goodwill to men with whom He is well pleased'. While the second translation is also valid, it should be noted that 'eudokia' does not have a condition upon it. This refers to all people, not just a select group. It is also reasonable to read this passage as: 'peace on earth, good will with/among humanity' - the **wish of an active good will between all people**.

He is correct that the noun form of 'eudokeo' does not have a condition upon it in this particular verse. However, I would argue that the ESV translation is most accurate because the entire rest of the Bible puts a condition upon this goodwill. Anyone familiar with the narrative of the Bible and of all people this church should be, knows that there's never been a time in history after the fall of Adam and Eve that God has been pleased with all of humanity simultaneously. If we understand this verse in the context of the biblical gospel recorded in genesis 1:1 through revelation 22:21 we would know that a universal peace between God and fallen humanity isn't possible. If there is peace among fallen human beings and a holy God and that holy God's good pleasure rests upon those fallen sinful humans, there must be an explanation. There must be a condition upon those particular people.

There was a time when there was peace between humanity and God and his good pleasure rested upon them. That time was before the fall of man and there were only two people on the earth. Those two people fell to temptation and introduced an ongoing war between humanity and God. It is a war that results from sin, which entered into all of humanity when Adam and Eve ate the fruit. Every human born after Adam is born into sin. No one is righteous, no not one, and no one seeks for God (Ps. 14 & Rom 3). King David knew this well when he said in Psalm 51:5 "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Even though we are born into sin and every facet of our being is affected by our sinful nature, we still have eternity in our hearts from birth (Ecc. 3:11). Also, all of creation around us screams at us that there is a God and that God is a magnificent, intelligent, creative and good God (Ps. 19:1-6 & Rom. 1:18ff). The combination of our sin nature and the general revelation of God creates in every human being a war. A war between self and God. Everyone's first birth is according to the flesh and the apostle Paul says in *Romans 8:7-8 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it*

does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. To put it another way, in our flesh we don't want to please God, we only want to please ourselves. We cannot think there has ever been a time in history where the good pleasure of God has rested upon all of fallen humanity. There must have been something distinctive about this particular people group upon which the peace and good pleasure of God came down that holy night of our dear Saviors birth.

The Distinction

I just told you of the greatest dilemma this world has ever known. That our sin nature separates us from our holy, righteous, and just Creator. No people group has ever known this dilemma better and more intimately than the nation of Israel. The entire Old Testament tells the story of how God was going to rectify this dilemma. In his sovereignty he chose the nation of Israel to be his peculiar people in order that he may preach the good news of salvation to all nations. God gave them his holy law through Moses to make this universal dilemma crystal clear. Sin separates from God and incurs his righteous displeasure. Because God is holy and perfect we too must be holy and perfect to commune with him. Through the moral aspect of God's law, known as the commandments, God demonstrated that no human can rectify the dilemma through good works. Also, In his law he developed a sacrificial system to instruct the world through Israel on how this dilemma must be resolved. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). Israel was given a taste of redemption through a sacrificial system led by the priests in the tabernacle and the temple. However, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear the system was temporary and was never designed to be the end within itself. From its inception it was meant to be a shadow and a foretaste of something greater to come.

God had foretold through the law and the prophets for ages there was a child who would be born to remedy this great dilemma for his people. There is a thread that runs through the entirety of the Old Testament that points to an ultimate Lamb of God who would give his life for the forgiveness of sins once and for all. The answer to everyone's war with God is the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to the Father.

The Jews waited for thousands of years for the arrival of their Messiah. The anointed one of God who would bring everlasting peace between

them and their Creator. And then came that holy night. The moment our Savior was born to the Virgin Mary that night everlasting peace began for all those who have believed, who were believing, and who would believe in the future. This is the good news of Christmas and why it is so important we do not lose the gospel meaning of every sacred phrase. The war is over, the Messiah has come. By believing in his name you may have peace on earth and his good pleasure upon you.

The same apostle Paul that told us life in the flesh is constant enmity and hostility towards God tells us that by faith in Christ we may have peace with God. No one is good enough to earn this through works. By believing, we receive the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. It is only when the righteousness of Christ has been credited to our account that God's good pleasure can rest upon us and be among us.

In closing I want to say a word first to my fellow believing brothers and sisters. Some of you can remember the war that raged within your soul before you were saved by the blood of Christ. Reflect upon that memory and thank God he has rescued you. Many of you came to Christ at a very young age and may not be able to recall the exact nature of that war. However, every day the war between your flesh and the Spirit of God remind you of that tension. Brothers and sisters, Merry Christmas, God has settled it once and for all. Rest in Christ who is your peace. Never forget, the goodwill of God brings you peace on this earth and his good pleasure rests upon you because the righteousness of Christ is yours.

We sang:

Glory shining for all to see
Hope alive let the gospel ring
God has made a way - He will have the praise
Tell the world His name is Jesus

Lastly, I want to say a word to those of you who have not truly been born again and come to believe. To those of you whom the war still rages in your heart today. Oh weary soul come to Jesus. The war has exhausted you. You are tired and though you fight you know deep down inside it's not a battle you can win. Believe what I have said from God's word. Your sin separates you from God. He is not pleased with you in your rebellion. In fact, his wrath burns against you. There is no peace on this earth for you. But this war can end right here right now. Wave your flag of surrender.

Believe that the baby in the manger came to permanently settle the greatest dilemma you face. Ask God to forgive you. Come to Jesus you weary soul and find rest. Give him your yoke for it is heavy and hard. Take his yoke upon yourself for it is easy and his burden is light.

CG Questions

1. Take a moment to discuss what the peace of God and his good pleasure has meant to you in your life.
2. Can you think of other biblical truths that have been distorted by secular holiday traditions?
3. What are some ways we can prevent these changes from happening?
4. As a fun discussion exercise look through the lyrics of some of our Christian Christmas hymns and discuss the elements of the gospel message that you see. You may want to choose a hymn and Google the lyrics or use hymnals if you have them. Some examples are, Hark the Herald Angels sing, oh holy night, silent night, joy to the world etc.
5. Why is it important that we as Christians make purposeful efforts to verbalize the gospel during the Christmas season?
6. Whether you're discussing these questions before or after celebrating Christmas take some time to pray for lost friends and family members that you will encounter or have encountered during this holiday season. Pray that God will use one of the gospel truths of our Christmas celebrations to bring them to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.