

This Christmas, you can find peace

Message for Sunday, December 15, 2019
by Bruce Fraser

Children's Message: from John 3:16-17

Bring a brightly wrapped Christmas present. It has my name on the tag.

Someone in the congregation gives it to me, but I don't accept it. Why not? Various reasons, but basically I just don't want to:

- Suspicious: why are you giving me a gift? What's the catch?
- Then I'd have to get a gift for you
- It might be a joke, like it'll explode sticky goo all over me
- It means you want to be my friend, and I don't want to have you as my friend.

The point: God wants to give us gifts at Christmas – joy, hope, love, peace. They are all part of the one great gift, Jesus.

Message: “This Christmas, you can find peace”

1) Christmas is about God's grace to us

I read a Peanuts cartoon with Lucy saying to Charlie Brown, “I hate everything. I hate everybody. I hate the whole wide world!”

Charlie says, “But I thought you had inner peace.”

Lucy replies, “I do have inner peace. But I still have outer obnoxiousness.”

God's gift to us at Christmas is a gift of peace. Here is the angels sang to the shepherds when Jesus was born, taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Luke 2:14, King James Version:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Our world still longs for that peace and harmony.

We especially look for this peace and good will at Christmas time; but too often the exact opposite happens. One person said that nothing has brought her family closer to divorce than putting up the Christmas tree!

I hope your family has a more positive experience with the decorations, but it's interesting that “goodwill toward men” does not refer to human harmony. Literally the angels are saying, “peace on earth to people on whom God's favour rests.” The key to Christmas is not our goodwill toward each other, which always falls short. The key is God's goodwill toward us, which is what Jesus is all about.

Let me say that again, because that is a summary of this whole message: **The key to Christmas is God's goodwill toward us, shown in Jesus.** Christmas is about God's grace—God's unwavering love—to us, which we find in Jesus.

2) Peace with others begins with peace with God

When we are filled with worry and fear and turmoil, we are more likely to take it out on the people around us. But when our hearts and minds have peace, then we can have peace in our relationships. Where does that inner peace come from? From Jesus living in us.

Colossians 3:15, New Living Translation:

Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace.

Notice the link between these two kinds of peace: first it talks about the peace which Jesus brings in our lives. Second, based on that foundation, it talks about the peace in our relationships with others.

The Bible is full of verses about the peace which comes from God.

Psalms 119:165, New Living Translation:

Those who love your law have great peace and do not stumble.

There's a saying which echoes this idea:

No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace.

People seek peace in all kinds of ways:

For many, peace of mind means drinking until they're so numb that they can no longer feel the pain in their hearts.

For some, peace means hopping from one relationship to the next, to the next, to the next, hoping that somebody will fill the void in their life. But nobody ever does.

For other people peace means working and working, becoming a workaholic and overachiever, so they can get all the tokens of success, and they can show the world that they're somebody! But inside they're saying, "I don't really feel like somebody."

Here's what real peace of mind is. Real peace of mind is having a relationship with Jesus Christ, God's Son, and becoming friends with God.

- Real peace is knowing that no matter what I do, God will never stop loving me.
- Real peace is knowing that no matter what happens, God will always be with me. I do not face life alone.
- Real peace means that no matter what happens in 2020, I know that God will give me the strength to bear it.
- Real peace is living by God's Word, the Bible, so I can avoid the behaviours that mess up my life.

3) Replace the things that rob our peace

There are three things that rob us of peace of mind: guilt, grief, and grudges.

First there's **guilt**. All of us make mistakes; that's part of being human. Some of us made awful mistakes, that hurt other people. But they weren't intentional.

I'm talking about when we deliberately, consciously choose to do something we know is wrong. The Bible calls that "sin." That's where guilt comes in. You can carry that guilt around with you for years, for all your life. But you don't have to. The message of Christmas is that Jesus came to be our Saviour, to take away our guilt. The Bible pictures it as being washed clean of our sins (see Acts 22:16). You can replace that guilt with the peace that Jesus gives.

Grief also robs us. You may be in major pain right now, because Christmastime brings up all kinds of hurtful memories. You may remember the loss of a loved one, or a parent who abandoned you, or a

divorce you went through, or the death of a spouse or child. There's also grief over losing your job or your home or your pet. You have grief that robs you of joy and peace of mind. If that's the pain you're carrying, I want you to know that I'm sorry you're hurting. I really am. But beyond my concern, God cares about your hurt. God knows all about it. You were never meant to carry that grief all on your own. Never!

1 Peter 5:7, New Living Translation:

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you.

Give God your worries and troubles, and receive the gift of peace. Cast all your burdens on the Lord.

Then there are **grudges** – grudges also rob us of peace. We feel guilty when we hurt others; but we become resentful or grudging when others hurt us. You will be hurt in life, whether intentionally or unintentionally. How you respond to that hurt will determine your level of happiness in life. When you hold a grudge against someone, it doesn't hurt the other person; it only poisons your own life, robbing you of your peace and joy. You need to forgive that person, and let go of that grudge.

But you may say, "Bruce, I can't. They hurt me too much. I can't forgive them." You're right. That's why you need Jesus Christ in your life. Once you have experienced God's love and forgiveness, then it becomes possible to pass that forgiveness on to others.

Indeed, Jesus commands us to forgive others:

Mark 11:25, Today's English Version:

When you stand and pray, forgive anything you may have against anyone, so that your Father in heaven will forgive the wrongs you have done."

Instead of carrying around these heavy loads of guilt, grief and grudges, wouldn't it be wonderful to replace them with peace? You can. Look again at the verse we read earlier:

Colossians 3:15, New Living Translation:

Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts.

Real peace comes from Jesus living in us. And then that peace just naturally spreads into our relationships.

Ask him to rule in your heart, to be your Lord.

Next Steps:

- Surrender your life to Jesus. Instead of resisting him in your life, let him be your ally, working with you.
- Filled with his peace, let that peace flow to others around you. Ask and give forgiveness freely.