

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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PEACE TOWARD MEN OF GOOD WILL (1)

Luke 2:14

The coming of the Messiah is a major theme of the OT. It is constantly repeated throughout the pages of the OT. In the NT, we are told that it is the angels who have the privilege to announce the imminent coming of Christ. We read in the gospel of Luke, in the nativity account, the incident in which an angel makes this surprising revelation: *...I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord* (Luke 2:10-11).

A revelation from heaven

This good news is for all mankind. And it is followed by another good news, that there is peace on earth. Today, by the Lord's grace, I would like to talk to you about peace. I would like to expound to you the message of peace of the angels as it is expressed in Luke 2:14. It is written there that a multitude of heavenly host praised God by saying, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased*. Peace toward men with whom God is pleased.

The background of this passage is familiar to all of you, I am sure. It is the passage about the shepherds who are in the field and they are watching over their flock by night. And suddenly, angels appeared to them because they have a message of great importance to say. Angels often appear on earth when there is an important message to announce on behalf of God. In fact, the very word 'angel' in Greek also means 'messenger'. And here, these messengers announce this important message. Luke 2:10-14.

Luke 2:10. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people;

11 for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased!"

I will base my message on this last verse, v. 14. *On earth peace among men with whom He is pleased*. We are very familiar with these words. We hear them every year during the Christmas period. It is not a verse that is necessarily easy to expound because of the problem that I would like to point out to you.

A translation problem

If you have a Bible that provides comments on the translation, you will read on your margin that v. 14 can also be translated by the sentence, *On earth peace, good will among men*. That means to say that there are two ways of reading this text. And if there are two ways of reading this text, you can suspect that there is a problem of translation.

The reason why we have two possible translations is because there is a difference of one letter in the sentence, the letter 's', or *sigma* if you want to use the Greek alphabet. And this is what creates the entire difference. Whether you decide for the presence or the absence of this letter 's' depends on which Greek manuscript you use to translate this verse. In some manuscripts of the Greek NT, the letter 's' is present. In other manuscripts, it is not there.

Remember that the Bible was originally transmitted down through the generations by hand until printing was invented in the 15th century. That means that for nearly 3000 years, one person or a group of people would copy the original text of the Bible. And then, it would be passed on to the next generation who would then copy the text again by hand. You can well imagine all the work that is involved to copy the whole Bible by hand. And you can also see what problems are involved. Humanly speaking, it is virtually impossible for anyone to copy by hand a book as long as the Bible without making some mistakes. That's why sometimes, we find some differences between the various manuscripts of the Bible that we have.

Nominative or genitive?

Coming back to our verse in Luke 2:14, we have then a difference of one letter in the Greek, the letter 's'. And this affects the word that is translated in English by the word 'pleasure'. The difference that it makes, is that by adding on the letter 's', you change a nominative into a genitive. And here I have to be somewhat technical because I want you to understand exactly what is happening here when we try to translate Luke 2:14.

If it is a nominative, then you would have the reading, 'Good will among men', or 'men of good will'. That is to say, the word explains the men. These men are people of good will. That's the translation that you will find if you have the NKJV. But if we have a genitive, we are saying, 'men of God's good pleasure'. And we would read, 'men with whom God is pleased'. That is what we find in the NASV for example. I have to say that this last reading is the preferred one for most scholars of our time.

Now, which one is right? Why would you decide for one or the other? The answer, in my opinion, is fairly simple. It doesn't really matter. Whether you decide for one translation or the other, it comes to exactly the same thing if you understand the principles of peace that I want to explain to you. You know, it is remarkable that in spite of these slight variations in the Greek manuscripts, these differences do not have the slightest effect upon theology. No doctrine of the Word of God is affected by these variations in copying.

First principle of peace

So what are these principles of peace that I just mentioned? There are three principles of peace that you must know as a Christian. For the remaining time of this lesson, I will show you the first principle. Then in our next lesson, we will deal with the two other principles of peace.

The first principle of peace is this. Peace can never be separated from righteousness or holiness. If there is one thing that you should remember from this lesson today, it is the principle that peace can never be separated from righteousness. These two things, peace and righteousness, always

go together. In other words, it means that where there is no righteousness, there will be no peace. Only where there is righteousness or holiness will there be peace. This is a spiritual and eternal principle of peace that is found throughout the whole Bible.

When you understand this spiritual law, you will agree that understanding Luke 2:14 whether with a 's' or no 's', whether it is a genitive or a nominative, it makes no difference at all. The meaning is exactly the same.

You see, the only kind of persons in whom God takes pleasure are righteous people. So whether you say, 'Men of good will', or 'Men in whom God takes pleasure', it makes no difference at all. Because if they are men of good will, then they are men of righteousness. And if they are men in whom God takes pleasure, then they are also men of righteousness. Either way, the meaning is exactly the same because God has pleasure only in people who are righteous.

This means that God does not have pleasure in sin and in those who enjoy sinning. God does not have pleasure in those who are wicked. The important word to notice is *pleasure*. We are not talking about love. The word here is pleasure. God may love a sinner, but He certainly does not have pleasure in his being a sinner.

This word 'pleasure' in the Bible is generally reserved for the Lord Jesus to say that God is pleased with Jesus. It is used for example at the Lord's baptism in Matthew 3:17 when God said, *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*. It is used again at the Lord's transfiguration in Matthew 17:5 where God said exactly the same thing, *This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*. God is pleased with Jesus. Why? Because Jesus is the Righteous One. In fact, it becomes a title of the Lord Jesus in 1John 2:1 where He is called *Jesus Christ the Righteous*. Jesus lived spotless in this world as far as sin is concerned. He is the Holy One of God. The Lord Jesus said, *I always do those things that please My Father* (John 8:29). His whole life was lived in such a way as to please the Father and the Father was well pleased.

To live a life of holiness means to live a life that is pleasing to God, a life lived in obedience to Him and in accordance with His will. When you live a life like this, you become pleasing to God, a man of God's good pleasure. That's the meaning of these words in Luke 2:14, *Peace on earth to those in whom God is pleased. Men (and women) of God's good pleasure*.

You will be able to enjoy peace in its richness when you live a life that is pleasing to God, living in His way and walking in His path. Peace is not something unconditional that you automatically get once you are baptized. Baptism is like walking in through the kingdom of God. You don't just stand inside the door. You have to move. You have to live, by God's power, the life of a subject of the kingdom of God. And then, peace will come. Make it your aim in life to say, like Jesus, 'I will live a life that is always pleasing to Him.' *I have come to do your will, O God* (Hebrews 10:9). Such a person is filled with deep spiritual peace because where there is holiness, there is peace.

Relationship between peace and holiness

In the Bible, whether it is in the NT or in the OT, you will find peace and holiness always joined together. You cannot pull them apart. If you want peace, you have to have holiness. If you have holiness, you will have peace.

Let's look at some references. Take for example Hebrews 12:14. *Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord*. Without holiness, you shall not see God. And without peace, you shall not see God either. Peace and holiness are locked together.

Or consider 2Timothy 2:22. This verse is especially addressed to young people who because of certain natural inclinations may be careless and result in losing their peace. So in this verse, Paul

says to Timothy, *Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.* Notice again the joining of righteousness at the beginning of this list and peace at the end of this list of four virtues. Righteousness and peace always come together. And in between, we have faith and love.

So pursue these four virtues, *with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.* If we didn't understand what righteousness is, Paul makes it very plain to us. It is a pure heart. This righteousness that Paul is talking about is the righteousness of a pure heart. *Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God* (Matthew 5:8). But *without holiness*, without this purity of the heart, *no man shall see God* (Hebrews 12:14). It is the pure in heart, the righteous, who shall see God.

But how do we get this holiness, this righteousness? Let's look at 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and notice again this amazing conjunction of peace and righteousness. This is what we read. *May the God of peace* (God is the God of peace because He is the God of holiness). *May the God of peace sanctify you completely.* To sanctify means to make holy. It is God who makes us holy. *And may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 'Blameless' is just another term of Paul for 'righteous'. Pure in heart, without blemish, spotless, blameless, these are just different expressions for righteousness and holiness. So Paul is saying that it is the God of peace who provides the power to make us holy so that we will be found blameless, righteous, at the second coming of Christ.

When God is not pleased

Now it is possible for us to hinder this process of sanctification because any work of God in us requires our collaboration. The major hindrance to our sanctification is the presence of sin in our lives. If there is sin in our lives, God will not be pleased with us. He will not be pleased with us if we desire evil, if we love sin.

This is the warning that we find in 1 Corinthians 10:5. Let me read that verse to you. 1 Corinthians 10:5. It says in that verse that *with most of them*, i.e. the Jews who were saved out of Egypt and who passed through the Red Sea. *With most of them God was not well pleased.* This word 'pleased' is exactly the same word that we have in Luke 2:14, *peace to men in whom God is pleased.*

Why was God not pleased with them, the chosen people of God? Because they desired evil. That's what the following verse tells us. Verse 6: *These things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.* They lusted after evil things, they desired evil. And therefore, God was not pleased with them.

You see, evil and peace cannot go together. Sin and peace just can't go together. That is a fundamental spiritual law that I want you to understand and remember. Only so will you understand the message of the angels in Luke 2:14. The angels didn't just say (as we usually read on Christmas cards), 'Peace on earth', but *peace on earth to men of good will.* Or to men in whom God is well pleased. Or to men in whom God takes pleasure. Why? Because these men love righteousness.

A warning

Do you know what happened to those Israelites in the wilderness with whom God was not pleased? Just read on 1 Corinthians 10 and you will see the tragedy that happened. They all perished in the wilderness. Some were destroyed by the serpents. Others were destroyed by the destroyer. Destruction came upon them. And don't say to yourself that this is OT stuff that doesn't apply to us. Paul says in that same passage, *these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things.* In other words, these things were written for our warning so that we do not desire evil things as they did. Paul was talking to the Corinthian Christians. And he is talking to us too.

Understand this clearly. Even if you are righteous now, but if out of your own choice you draw back from your righteousness in Christ, if you decide to draw back from purity of heart, God will not be pleased with you. And I cannot guarantee that He will not do the same as He did with the Israelites in the wilderness.

In Hebrews 10:38-39, we have these words about God not being pleased with those who walk away from righteousness. It says, *But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back* (i.e. if he draws back from righteousness), *My soul has no **pleasure** in him.* 39 *But we are not of those who **shrink back to destruction**, but of those who have faith to the **preserving** of the soul.* Here the writer to the Hebrews speaks of two kinds of believers with regard to faithfulness, two kinds of righteous ones. The Christian whose faith remains committed to God until the end will have his soul preserved. But the Christian whose faith shrinks back, draws back from righteousness and turns away from God will displease God. And the end for such a person, if there is no change, is destruction. These people are *those who draw back to perdition*, to destruction, just as the Israelites were destroyed in the wilderness.

Peace and righteousness in the Old Testament

So this is the clear teaching of the Scriptures. Evil and peace cannot go together. That is why in Isaiah 57:21, God says that *there is no peace for the wicked*. The wicked cannot find peace anywhere in heaven or on earth, or under the earth. To those who do not love righteousness, there is no peace.

You see that this same principle is already there when you go back to the OT. Read for example Isaiah 32:17. *The work of **righteousness** will be **peace**, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever.* Peace and righteousness are constantly linked together.

Or listen to these beautiful words in Psalm 85:10. ***Righteousness and peace** have kissed together.* In the Scriptures, righteousness and peace are so closely united that they are said here to have kissed together. You just can't take them apart.

Finally, let me read to you Isaiah 59:8. *The way of peace they have not known.* Why? Because *there is no justice in their ways*. If the world wants to find peace, there is no other way than to walk on the path of justice, of righteousness. And this righteousness is found only in Christ, who is our righteousness.

So understand deeply this fundamental principle, that in the spiritual world, peace and righteousness cannot be separated. Where there is holiness, there is peace. Where there is sin, there is turmoil and restlessness. This coming Christmas, don't just pray 'Peace on earth', but *Peace on earth to those in whom God is pleased*. And God is pleased only with people who are righteous. These are the people who will have peace. This is the message of the angels.