

Finding the Peace of Christmas -- Isaiah 9:6

I read about a couple who retired in 1980. They were alarmed by the threat of nuclear war, so they undertook a serious study of all the countries of the world which would be least likely to experience war. They wanted to be sure they spent their last years in peace & security. They studied & they traveled all over the world, talking to people, & gathering as much information as they could. Finally, they found the place which seemed the most out of the way spot where they could live in peace.

The Christmas of 1981, they sent their pastor a card from their new home in the Falkland Islands. If you know anything about the Falkland Islands, you know they are small islands off the coast of Argentina, which seem like paradise. But if you know history, you may also know that these islands turned into a war zone early in 1982, just after this retired couple made it their home, seeking a place of peace & security. Argentina's then military government decided to invade the islands, & were defeated by Great Britain in the conflict now recorded as the Falkland War. The war lasted 72 days & claimed nearly 1000 casualties. Obvious, the retired couple did not find peace in the Falklands!

And here we are, Christmas 2014, as it dawns on a world raging with hatred, malice, greed, & ever-present conflict & war. It is not a pleasant picture we see as we look out on our generation. We sing the Christmas Carol, *Silent night! holy night! All is calm, all is bright ... Sleep in heavenly peace; Sleep in heavenly peace.* But in much of the world today the night is not silent, & it is not holy.

Ours is a world of political, economic, & social turmoil. It seems as though every day the headlines scream of some new crisis in our world that threatens to plunge us into chaos. Peace is a stranger to our generation, with wars in abundance. Did you know that in the past one thousand years, there have been fewer than fifty years that have not seen active conflict in some part of the world? Even now, Iraq, Afghanistan, & elsewhere in the Middle East, Central America, & even in Ferguson, MO, suffers blood shed & tension. **Where are the peacemakers when we need them?**

It is not just world conflict; individual lives have been equally chaotic; homes & marriages torn apart; civil strife; crime on the street & in politics. **So where is the peace we sing about at Christmas?** Peace is something that all of us **need**, & most of us **don't have**. Most of us spend a great deal of time & energy **pursuing** peace, but very little time **experiencing** peace. Our desire to have a better, more fulfilling life keeps us awake at night. Questions plague our minds, about what **could** have been, or what **should** have been. We want to be fulfilled, satisfied; we want to be complete, but we lack that completeness, & as a result **we lack peace**. Rather than days filled with peace & confidence, we find our days filled with stress & worry. Often that sensation is **heightened at Christmas** because we hear all about peace on earth, but we can't find peace in our own lives.

So where is peace? In **Isaiah 9:6** it was prophesied: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, & the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." On that first Christmas Day: "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God & saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, & on earth peace, good will toward men'" (Luke 2:13-14).

What did all of that mean? Such a commotion over such a small child, born in an obscure village to humble parents. Such a powerful promise about one who appeared so powerless. He would never sit on a throne, or lead an army. He did not begin a bureaucracy, or leave behind an impressive & well-organized group of followers. In fact, history knows very little about the lives of most of His followers. To the dismay of many, Jesus did not

advocated the overthrow of the government which held Israel in captivity.

He came bringing **peace of another kind & another dimension**. He said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled & do not be afraid" (John 14:27). **In a culture which is trying to medicate it's way to peace, the message of Jesus has never been more relevant.** But the peace Christ gives does not come in the ways that we might think. It comes in **unexpected** ways; ways that for many seem weak & unacceptable. My friends, **peace is found only where it has always been found, & that is in the Person of Jesus Christ!** He is still the Prince of Peace; He is still the One who says, "Peace I leave with you; -- my peace I give you." The Apostle Paul says of Jesus, "For He Himself is our peace" (Eph. 2:14). One of the great things about Christmas is that if we truly accept **in faith** what God gave us, His Son, then we can experience **peace!**

I want to point out three simple ways for **you** to experience peace. If you follow them, you will have peace in your mind & heart. You may continue to have **conflict on the outside**, over which you do not have control, **but peace will come to your heart.**

Christ did not come to shield us from ... The grief & pain of life;

But those who have His peace inside ... Can thrive within the strife. -- (David Sper)

These are simple ways, nothing really profound, but powerful in their ability to give peace. Where do we find peace?

1. First -- **We find it through Humility!**

It is so hard to have peace when you are trusting in yourself, because you can't do everything, & you are not in control no matter how much you want to be. If you want peace, you have to stop relying on yourself, & stop trying to figure things out on your own. **You cannot be full of pride & full of God at the same time.**

I came across an interesting Chinese proverb recently. I didn't know this, but all Chinese proverbs are told by speaking only four Chinese characters; four words. This parable is called "Frog -- Well -- Sky -- World." The parable's meaning is that a **frog** in a **well** can only see the **sky** above him, & he thinks that small circle of blue sky is the whole **world**. He believes he sees & understands the entire world: "Frog -- Well -- Sky -- World." Typical of Asian thought, it is a proverb about **the importance of humility**. You are like a frog in a well, & you can only see & understand what is available to you. **Don't be so proud as to think you know everything.** Peace comes when you realize that **you don't understand it all**, & you are not the center of the universe, even if you are the center of the well.

Your worth, your value, is in **who you are in God**, & **not** in what you have accomplished. The Bible says: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, & He will lift you up" (James 4:10). **Remember that God is the Creator, & you are His creation.** Or as the Psalmist put it: "Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, & we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture" (100:3). **Remember that there is a God & you are not Him.** Stop acting like you are in charge of your life, & recognize the ownership of God over your life & over the world. When you walk in that **humility**, you walk in the peace of understanding who you are, & where you fit in the scheme of things. When you walk in **pride**, you have no direction because you are walking in spiritual blindness, & disaster is stalking you.

The Proverb says: "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (16:18). The Bible warns: "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

I can have peace because my self worth is grounded in **what God thinks of me**. I don't have to constantly be worrying about what **others** think, because **my approval comes from God**. Arrogance is unnecessary when you experience God's acceptance. You don't have to prove anything, & you have deep-down peace.

King Sobhuza II of Swaziland was, at the time of his death in 1982, the longest reigning monarch in the world. Feathered in the Guinness Book of World Records, he reigned for 61 years. Those who truly observed him, were always impressed by his **humbleness & gentleness**. Although he had such immense power & prestige, so much so that men would fall headlong before him, when he spoke, it was always with a **humble attitude**, & with great respect for the people of his kingdom. It is not surprising that the nation of Swaziland, during the long reign of this man, was known as a place of peace. If only it were the same today! Where do we find peace? Not in our grand accomplishments & pride, but in a humble spirit.

2. The second place we find peace is: -- **We find it in Believing!**

You cannot have peace if you will not put your whole faith & trust in God & God's Word. You have to believe in His reality, His truth, & His promises. Our culture promotes the idea that really intelligent people do not believe; they only question. And so we have come to the place where we cannot really be sure of anything, & everyone's beliefs are as good as anyone else's.

But you cannot entertain unrelenting skepticism & still have peace. You cannot be a lifelong cynic & have peace. **At some point in time you have to come down & plant your feet in what you truly believe to be true**. You have to eventually say, "I may not understand everything, & I still have questions, but I place my whole trust & faith in God, & in His revealed Word." Without that, there is only frustration & despair. You will never be sure of anything. If you are going to wait until you understand everything before you have faith, you will die in your doubt. You don't have to understand everything; -- in fact, you can't. **Faith is what goes beyond understanding**.

The Bible says: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). **Peace & faith go together**. You have to believe there is a God who has made the world, & that He is **your** Creator. You have to believe there is a **purpose** in it all, & that God has a **plan**. And you also have to believe that there is such a thing as **truth**, & that God has revealed His truth to us in the Book we call the **Bible**. **The truth revealed in the Bible has transformed the lives of millions of people throughout history**.

Fyodor Dostoevsky was 25-years-old when his first book captured the hearts of the Russian people. His fame quickly went to his head, & he began to drink too much. It was in that state that he did something that altered the direction of his life. After drinking too much, he began criticizing the government. He was not only arrested but sentenced to death. Fortunately for him, those in power showed mercy & commuted his sentence to four years of hard labor. So on Christmas Eve, 1849, Dostoevsky was sent to Siberia, as he described it: "like a man buried alive. . . nailed down in his coffin."

But Dostoevsky was about to meet **God**, & learn that God could bring about good even in the harshness of Siberia. As he arrived in that desolate region, two women slipped a New Testament into his hand, & when the officer's back was turned, whispered to him, "Search it carefully at your leisure." As he poured over the New Testament in the Siberian labor camp, he discovered the beauty of the parable of the prodigal son, the parable that would influence all of his future writings. It revealed to him the marvelous mercy of his Heavenly Father. He would later write from Siberia: "One sees the truth more clearly when one is unhappy, & yet God gives me moments of perfect peace; in such moments I love & believe that I am loved; in such moments I have formulated my creed,

wherein all is clear & holy to me.” That life change led him to write novels after his release that have influenced millions of lives. When he surrendered his mind to Christ, he found deep peace. The struggle was over & he began to experience life in a way that he had never done before. The same will be true for you -- my dear friend!

3. The third place we find peace is: -- **We find it in Surrender!**

But we need to do **more** than just surrender our **minds** to find peace. **We must surrender our will totally to God's will.** There are whole lot of people who feel that as long as they are religious & believe in God, that is all there is to it. But my friends, you must **surrender** your life to God & live in loving **obedience** to Him before faith comes alive. A lot of people think faith is like a scale where God says, “Well, on this side they believe in me & they go to church, so I'll just forget the stuff on the other side.” **But at some point belief must result in surrender.** And this is the hardest part. More people stay away from God because of this than for any other reason. They are willing to believe in God, **IF** they do not have to obey Him. They rebel against His authority in their lives, even though He is their Creator & God. **But if you think living for God is difficult, try living without God.** To live without God is a hard & grinding way. The lessons learned are learned with bitter tears of regret & grief.

Jesus tells us: “Take my yoke upon you & learn from me, for I am gentle & humble in heart, & you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy & my burden is light” (Matthew 11:29-30). There is a yoke, but it is not like the cruel yoke of disobedience & rebellion. It is Christ's yoke, & as we surrender to it & place ourselves under it, we discover that it is a double yoke, & Christ is there with us, helping to carry the load. Whatever burden we bear is nothing compared with the isolating bondage & slavery we experience in a life **apart** from God.

The prodigal son thought that it was oppressive in his father's house. There were rules to follow, & he had to work & accept responsibility. It seemed unbearable to him, until he left & went far away from home & lived a reprobate life. The bondage there was cruel, & it left him starving, in great distress, & living like an animal. The Bible says: “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, & here I am starving to death! I will set out & go back to my father & say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven & against you’” (Luke 15:17-18).

If you are going to have peace you have to admit that you are wrong. You are going to have to give in to God. You have to come to your senses. You have to wake up to the fact that your life is not working, & that it is in fact being ruined by your refusal to surrender your will to the will of God. You do not have peace because you believe one thing & are living another. The Bible describes those who refuse to surrender to God when it says: “Wherever they go, destruction & misery follow them. They do not know what true peace is” (Romans 3:16-18 NLT). The Bible says: “If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life & peace” (Romans 8:6 NLT).

This describes the life of the prodigal son before he came to his senses, but he discovered the wonderful reality that as soon as you surrender & turn your heart toward home, the father runs to meet you & greets you with an embrace.

Conclusion: -- Gordon McDonald tells a wonderful story: A Nigerian woman, who is a physician at a great teaching hospital in the United States, came up to him & spoke to him about the lecture McDonald had just given. She introduced herself using an American name. McDonald asked: “What's your African name?” She immediately gave it to him, several syllables long with a musical sound to it. He asked: “What does the name mean?” She answered: “It means ‘Child who takes the anger away.’”

When McDonald inquired as to why she would have been given this name, she said: “My parents had been

forbidden by their parents to marry one another. But my parents loved each other so much that they defied the family opinions & married anyway. For several years they were ostracized from both their families. Then my mother became pregnant with me," she said. "And when the grandparents held me in their arms for the first time, the walls of hostility came down. I became the one who swept the anger away. And that's the name my mother & father gave me." McDonald concluded: "**It occurred to me that her name would be a suitable one for Jesus.**"

Yes, when Jesus came, He was the Child who took the anger away between ourselves & God. God's wrath melted, & our anger at God was over. Jesus brought a Holy God & sinful man together. He was the Child who takes the anger away, or as we know Him: **The Prince of Peace.**

Peace begins in our hearts! The peace promised that first Christmas night begins in the soul. When there is peace in the **heart**, there is peace in the **family**; when there is peace in the family, there is peace in the **community**; when there is peace in the community, there is peace in the **nation**; when there is peace in the nation, there is peace in the **world**. **Christmas reminds us there is hope!** The beautiful message of the angels to shepherds long ago was, "Glory to God in the highest, & on earth peace, good will toward men."

There is a beautiful chorus which asks: "*Is your all on the alter of sacrifice laid? Your heart does the Spirit control? You can only be blest, -- And have **peace** & sweet rest, As you yield Him your body & soul.*"

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