

HE CAME WITH PEACE
REFLECTIONS ON LUKE 2:14 AND 19:38

Perhaps you heard about the massive headline on the front page of the New York Daily News the day after the shootings in San Bernardino, CA. A page-long headline surrounded on both sides by quotations from a variety of politicians who asserted they were praying for the families of the victims boldly and cynically declared, “God Isn’t Fixing This.” The subtitle declared: “As latest batch of *innocent Americans* are left lying in pools of blood, *cowards* who could truly *end gun scourge*, continue to hide behind meaningless *platitudes*.” [Their emphasis]



Granted, the article was a quest for increasing gun-control laws, but the headline *is* worth considering: *Does* God fix problems of violence? *Does* God fix injustice and unrighteousness? *Does* God listen to prayers and is it worth praying for the needy or is praying an overstated platitude?

We *do* live in a violent, corrupt, unjust, sinful world. Is God powerless against this violence? It appears that sin and sinfulness are increasing in power and prevalence. Can’t God stop the sin? Or is God part of the solution to the corruption of our world?

Two passages at the extreme ends of Christ’s life declare the work of God to “fix this.” And His work is not a platitude. It is the genuine work of a great Savior.

The first declaration of Christ’s ability to address the problems of this world is given on the day of Christ’s birth and is found in **Luke 2:14**. The angels in Heaven appeared to the shepherds and boldly declared, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” What the angels declare to us is —

1. In His Birth, Christ Brought Peace to Earth (2:14)

Say what you will about the article in the New York newspaper, one thing the editors got right is that the world knows an absence of peace. It’s been that way since early in the history of mankind. From at least the time of Cain’s murder of Abel, man has been at enmity with other men. And the nation of Israel particularly knew a lack of peace, being in captivity in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, and seemingly perpetually under siege from various other countries.

The prophets also affirmed this lack of peace:

- ✓ “There is no peace for the wicked,” says the Lord. (Is. 48:22; cf. also 57:21)
- ✓ “They [the false and wicked prophets and priests] have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ but there is no peace.” (Jer. 6:14)

- ✓ [Jeremiah's lament to the Lord:] "Have You completely rejected Judah? Or have You loathed Zion? Why have You stricken us so that we are beyond healing? *We* waited for peace, but nothing good *came*; And for a time of healing, but behold, terror!" (Jer. 14:19)

So when the angels came with their announcement, they were declaring something that was both wanted and in some ways unexpected. Israel's history was filled with conflict, war, and savagery from other nations. They wanted peace, but could they really expect it?

The declaration ***on earth peace among men*** was not intended to be a statement that God would instantly remove all animosity from the earth and that all people would love all other people everywhere. But it *was* a statement that if anyone wanted peace he could have it. Peace had arrived on earth in the person of Christ and was being made available to all men. What political structures could not do, Jesus — the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6) — would.

But notice especially that it says this peace would be granted and known ***among men with whom He is pleased***. Any man can have the peace of Christ, but not all will. The only ones who have Christ's peace are the ones who are pleasing to God. That doesn't mean that men can do things to ingratiate God to them. The phrase more literally reads, "men of His good pleasure," and means, "those upon whom God's will/favour rests" [Marshall, quoted by MacArthur]. In other words, the peace of God is given to those who have experienced the grace of God in salvation.

No one will know peace apart from God's grace (e.g., **Rom. 3:23-24**). If you are not a Christian —

- ✓ You are a sinner deserving eternal death and God's eternal wrath
- ✓ Freedom from sin's penalty (God's wrath) is made available through grace by the death of Christ
- ✓ That freedom from sin's penalty also liberates you to do good works — so that you may live for God
- ✓ There is no better way to recognize Christmas than to begin a new life with God by trusting Christ for salvation and asking Him to give you the peace that He provides

We who live in the midst of conflict, anger, and sin can know the peace of Christ. That's what He brought in His advent. But there is a further peace that He also brought — this is revealed in a declaration made by the crowds as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, just days prior to His crucifixion —

2. In His Death, Christ Made Peace in Heaven (19:38)

At His advent, the angels declared that there was peace on earth. At His triumphal entry, the crowds rightly declared that because of His Messianic position, there was also peace in Heaven.

To say that there is peace in Heaven is to say that God is no longer justly angry with men and that men have been reconciled to Him. His wrath has been appeased.

That wrath could only be appeased by the work of Christ when He died for sin. No sinful man could ever appease God's wrath against sin and no sinful man could ever remove the penalty of his own sin by any good deed(s). But the perfect God-Man, Jesus Christ, could remove that penalty through His death on the cross. And that is just what He did. In Romans 4, Paul states that righteousness was credited to Abraham because of Abraham's faith in God. Then listen to what Paul says about us —

“Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, *He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.” (Rom 4:23-25)

And then he concludes: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” There it is. Peace with God in Heaven. We have been reconciled to Him; He is at peace with us. Once enemies, now we are sons.

This is the Christmas message, as you know.

On earth with men, and in Heaven with God, Christ — the incarnate God-Man — has made peace.

Certainly it is true that not all men know this peace — that's why you will find silly and sinful headlines like the one in the NY newspaper. But that is not an indictment of God and His inability. It is an indictment of men who persistently pursue a peace apart from following Christ. And there will be no peace until one submits to the Savior. And the Christmas message is that Christ has made that very peace available.