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Reclaiming Christmas

December 6, 2009

Introduction:

We need to reclaim Christmas. In the process of reclaiming Christmas, we will strengthen our relationship with God and with family; we will strengthen our resolve to serve others in our community and by doing so we will shape our spirit. When I talk about reclaiming Christmas, I mean that we need to celebrate the advent of Jesus with the original intent of Christmas in mind. Just because we may not have as much of the trappings this Christmas, maybe are unable to give as many gifts as we have in the past, we can still celebrate and do more with less. The celebration and all that goes with Christmas and Advent doesn't have to be ruined because things are more sparse. Peace doesn't come from the gifts we give or receive. God was the one who established Christmas in the first place. So let's enjoy reclaiming it as the event it was meant to be.

I love reclaimed things. There have been a number of antiques that I have reclaimed since I've been married. Refinishing them and restoring them to usefulness is a fun and rewarding hobby. So how much more rewarding is it to take Christ's first coming and truly celebrate it the way it should be celebrated? I happened to see a program two weeks ago about a couple who built a new home. In it they used reclaimed wood from a bridge that had been built in the early 20th century. The wood was beautiful. They made a point on the program to inform that the cost of the reclaimed wood was four times more than it would have been if they had used brand new wood.

We need to reclaim Christmas to its original specifications. We need to reclaim the peace that God wanted Christmas to represent. The night that Jesus was born, the angel chorus rang out with "Glory to God in the Highest and on earth, peace good will toward men." So how is it that we can celebrate this Advent with less?

The themes that we are talking about during this Advent season, HOPE, PEACE, JOY, LOVE, are things that money can't buy. Yet these are the true gifts of Christmas.

Paul Harvey once told the story just before Christmas of a father whose son had gone off to fight for the union army during the American civil war. After months of staying in camp, his son finally saw battle and was seriously wounded. News of his son's wound came to the father on Christmas Eve and being a poet he sat down and expressed his anguish in a song. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote these words as he contemplated that bleak Christmas morning:

And in despair I bowed my head
"There is no peace on earth I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth and good will to men."

We cannot fully celebrate Christmas without knowing and enjoying the peace or the shalom of God. So let's spend a few minutes this morning talking about reclaiming Christmas and the peace that comes from God. I'm not too sure how you define peace, but here in America we define peace as the absence of war. If there is no war there is peace. However, the word that is used in the Old Testament for peace is "Shalom" and it means so much more than the absence of conflict. Shalom is used to describe the end of hostilities but the word itself also speaks of health and wholeness. It denotes harmony and completeness. To have shalom is to have a quiet life that is fulfilling in every way.

When you have shalom there is no feeling of harm or hurt. When you have shalom you are in a state of ease and safety. There is no fear, no worry but a sense of harmony and oneness. You know your purpose and you have a sense of wholeness and completeness. Everything is exactly the way it should be. Nothing is out of order. Your inner world as well as the outer world is in harmony. This is shalom; this is the peace that Jesus brings for He is our Prince of Peace.

Using this definition in Scripture, I think there are some distinct ways that Christ fulfills his title as Prince of Peace. Some of you sitting here right now are saying, "Sure, peace, that is easy for you to say. You don't know my struggle with God, or my struggle within myself, or my struggle with someone else."

No, I don't but that is where Christ comes into the picture as the Prince of Peace and this is why He can help you:

1. He is the one who makes peace between God and man.
2. He is the one who brings health and wholeness within our lives.
3. He is the one who brings peace between us and others.
4. At His return, He will set up a kingdom of peace.

I. Jesus brings peace between us and God.

Isaiah 53:4-6 (GW) He certainly has taken upon himself our suffering and carried our sorrows, but we thought that God had wounded him, beat him, and punished him. He was wounded for our rebellious acts. He was crushed for our sins. He was punished so that we could have peace, and we received healing from his wounds. We have all strayed like sheep. Each one of us has turned to go his own way, and the Lord has laid all our sins on him.

If you want peace with God, you have to go through Christ Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Him. Our sin is what causes us to be at odds with God. Our sin is what keeps us from experiencing God's incredible peace. Our sin is what separates us from knowing God the way He would like us to know Him and our sin causes conflict between us and our creator.

II. Jesus paid the price for Peace.

Peace doesn't come cheaply; there is a cost involved. To achieve peace, one has to come into agreement. Laying down hostilities helps when you are attempting to have peace. Some people attempt to earn peace with God by their works, their attempts to be righteous, their generosity or by what they sacrifice. As wonderful as those things are, those things of themselves will not bring us to a place of peace with God. The only way to have peace with God is to enter into agreement with Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace.

God reached out to establish peace with man. Peace is based on His initiative. In sending Jesus born of a virgin, born under the law, He made it possible for Christ to fulfill the law and bring shalom into our lives. The prophet Isaiah spoke these words about Jesus' first coming and said: **Isaiah 9:6 (GW) A child will be born for us. A son will be given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. He will be named: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** It is recorded in Luke that the very night that Jesus was born, angels, who are heavenly messengers, proclaimed this message: **Luke 2:14 (NLT) Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.**

III. Jesus brings health and wholeness within our lives.

There may be some things that you are troubled about within yourself. You are not experiencing God's peace because of something within yourself. You may not be able to accept something about yourself, or you may not be able to forgive yourself and because of that you are troubled and the shalom, which is the wholeness and healing that you want and could have, is not present in yourself. Perhaps your worry and fear are keeping God's peace from living within your life.

At times we think of healing as that which brings wholeness and restoration to the body but there is a healing that transforms us inwardly. When Jesus came, He came to bring shalom; health and wholeness to our inner being as well as our outward life. If we are not at peace with God who has made us and we do not have His shalom within ourselves, how can we ever expect to celebrate His coming appropriately? He came to bring shalom, to set at

liberty those who are bound. The bondage that we put ourselves into, by not forgiving ourselves, not accepting the peace of God when we are troubled, is detrimental to our wholeness.

IV. Jesus brings peace between us and others.

The shalom I've been talking about is available but we have a part to play in the process of cooperation. Perhaps you are not experiencing the shalom that is ours in Christ because you are in conflict with a brother or sister in Christ or even with someone in your own family, such as a spouse, a parent, a child or a sibling. If we cannot be at peace with everyone, at least we can be a peace-lover, a peace-maker, and strive to deal with the issues that interfere with such shalom between us and others. **Romans 12:18 (GW) As much as it is possible, live in peace with everyone.**

If you realize that you and other followers of Christ are part of the same family of God, that should cause us to rejoice and give us the motivation to live in peace with others in the family of God. When there are differences, when there are issues, when there is conflict, Jesus wants to bring us to a place of shalom. Deal with it and move on. **Isaiah 9:7 (GW) His government and peace will have unlimited growth. He will establish David's throne and kingdom. He will uphold it with justice and righteousness now and forever. The Lord of Armies is determined to do this!**

Let me close with this story: The Jesus Store. There was a woman once who wanted peace in the world and peace in her heart, but she was very frustrated. The world seemed to be falling apart and her personal life wasn't that great either. One day she decided to go shopping and she went to the mall and walked into one of the stores. She was surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was Jesus because he looked just like the paintings she'd seen in museums and in devotional books. Finally she got up her nerve and asked, "Excuse me, but are you Jesus?" "I am." "Do you work here?" "In a way; I own the store." "Oh, what do you sell here?" "Just about everything," Jesus replied. "Feel free to walk up and down the aisles, make a list, see what it is you want, and then come back and I'll see what I can do for you." Well, she did just that. She walked up and down the aisles, writing furiously. There was

peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty. There was peace in families, harmony, no dissension, no more drugs. There was careful use of resources. By the time she got back to the counter, she had a long list. Jesus looked over the list, then smiled at her and said, "No problem." And then he bent down behind the counter and picked out all sorts of things, finally stood up, and laid out the packets on the counter. "What are these?", the

woman asked. "Seed packets," Jesus answered. "This is a catalog store." "You mean I don't get the finished product?" "No, this is a place of dreams. You come and see what it looks like and I give you the seeds. You go home and plant the seeds. You water them and nurture them and help them to grow and someday someone else reaps the benefits." "Oh," she said. And she left the store without buying anything.

CONCLUSION:

The shalom I've been talking about is available, but we have a part to play in the process of being at peace with God, of being at peace with ourselves and with others.