

When Peace is Uneasy

Luke 1:57-79 on December 11, 2022

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Please read Luke 1:57-79 before going further in this transcript.

The Scripture reading passage today includes one of the two songs that are recorded in Luke 1.¹ Last week Matt Graf talked about Mary's song, the "Magnificat²," her song glorifying the Lord. Today's Scripture passage now records Zechariah's song, which is also a song that glorifies the Lord. Zechariah begins in Luke 1:68, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them." I hope you had the opportunity to pick up one of these little advent devotionals titled "Good News of Great Joy." I know Debbie and I have really been enjoying ours during our morning coffee together. Here are a few words from Day 3: "Nine months earlier, Zechariah had not believed that his wife would have a child. Now, filled with the Holy Spirit, he has become so confident of God's redeeming work in the coming Messiah that he puts it in the past tense: [“he HAS come to his people and redeemed them”].”³ You see, Jesus hadn't even been born yet; He was still in Mary's womb at this point. But Zechariah has complete confidence that God's will is unstoppable. At the very 1st Christmas, Jesus came to this earth to redeem us, to buy us back from our slavery to sin; and part of that redemption was to buy us peace. Peace with God and peace with one another. Zechariah's song ends with a crescendo of peace. Verse 79 says, “[Jesus came] to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”^{4 5}

This morning we're going to focus on this "path of peace." Around the holidays we often hear and see the phrase "peace on earth." It's plastered everywhere: on store fronts, in commercials, on Christmas cards. You name it, wherever Christmas is being celebrated, you'll find "peace on earth" being celebrated.



This idea of "peace on earth" is an idea that most of us can wholeheartedly agree on, whether we're following Christ or not. If only... peace was this easy though.⁶ On the night of Jesus' birth, Luke 2:13-14 tells us, "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Let's take note of the

¹ There are two more songs in Luke 2, Luke 2:14 and 2:29-32. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1702 footnote on Luke 1:46-55.

² "Mag ni fuh KAAT"

³ He goes on, "For the mind of faith, a promised act of God is as good as done." John Piper, *Good News of Great Joy*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2021, p. 29.

⁴ The Greek word for peace here is εἰρήνη = "① a state of concord, peace, harmony... ② a state of well-being, peace." William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 287.

⁵ εἰρήνη = "a set of favorable circumstances involving peace and tranquility... The meaning of 'peace' or 'tranquility' may be expressed in some languages in a negative form, for example, 'to be without trouble' or 'to have no worries' or 'to sit down in one's heart.'" Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 246.

⁶ Last week Matt Graf mentioned the song, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." The words to this song are worth pondering in light of today's message. <https://hymnary.org/text/i-heard-the-bells-on-christmas-day>

nuance here; not peace to everyone, but peace “to those on whom his favor rests.”⁷ So this is why so many people in our world today are not experiencing peace, because God’s favor doesn’t rest on them. I appreciate how the *ESV* translates verse 14, “...on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” You see, the Lord isn’t pleased with everyone; His favor doesn’t rest on everyone. So, not everyone on this earth experiences His peace. This morning, we’re not just going to talk about the path of peace, we’re going to talk about why peace is sometimes uneasy.

Peace is sometimes uneasy because...

1. We need to receive salvation.^{8 9} My *NIV Study Bible* notes that, at the time of Jesus’ birth, “The Roman world was experiencing the Pax Romana (‘Roman peace’), marked by external tranquility.¹⁰ But the angels proclaimed a deeper, more lasting [inner] peace... a peace of mind and soul made possible by the Savior. Peace with God is received by faith in Christ.”¹¹ Romans 5:1-2 declares, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand...” Therefore the only way that we can have genuine, lasting peace, is through faith in Jesus Christ. We can only have peace with God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. So if you’re finding God’s peace UNEASY, the first thing to consider is that each one of us needs to receive salvation in order to receive God’s peace. That’s what Luke 2:14 is driving at, God’s favor rests on those who’ve placed their faith in Christ. God gives His peace to those with whom He is pleased, meaning those who receive salvation. (So it’s available to all.)

Salvation brings us a sense of total well-being, a sense of inner rest in our spirit, as we enjoy close fellowship with God.¹² When we talk about the “peace of God” we mean an inner tranquility, a sense of calm, “based on peace with God – the peaceful state of those whose sins are forgiven...”¹³ Let’s look at Luke 1:79 again, “[Jesus came] to

⁷ In other words, “Peace is not assured to all, but only to those pleasing to God.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1704 footnote on Luke 2:14.

⁸ Which can lead to further conflict with the devil and unbelievers, but we’re already in conflict with them anyhow. “But Christ also brought conflict, for peace with God involves opposition to Satan and his work.” See Matthew 10:34-36 and Mark 10:29-30. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1704 footnote on Luke 2:14.

⁹ The Old Testament prophets foretold that Jesus would come to bring us peace. Isaiah 9:6-7 talks about Jesus, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end...” As our “Prince of Peace,” Jesus offers us an immediate personal and corporate peace. Both a personal internal peace within our spirits, as well as a corporate peace with one another, particularly among those of us who share in a common salvation. There is also a promise of a future perfect peace at Jesus’ 2nd coming, when He sets up His kingdom, His government if you will. At that future time, the new heaven and earth will experience a peace like nothing we’ve ever experienced before. See Revelation 21:1-5. The peace being referred to here not only includes social and political peace but also the final cosmic peace that Jesus will bring at the end of human history. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2070 footnote on Luke 1:79.

¹⁰ [Albeit at the point of their sword!]

¹¹ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1704 footnote on Luke 2:14.

¹² *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1797 footnote on John 14:27.

¹³ “...The opposite of anxiety, it is the tranquility that comes when believers commit all their cares to God in prayer and worry about them no more.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2006 footnote on Philippians 4:7.

shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” Isaiah 9:2 predicted this very thing, some 700 years earlier, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”¹⁴ It’s impossible for us to experience peace in our lives if we’re still living in darkness, if we’re still spiritually lost and separated from God.¹⁵ That’s why Jesus came: to shine His light on us!¹⁶ If you’ve not yet received salvation, why not talk to someone about that today?

Well this explains why peace is uneasy for those who still need to receive salvation, but, it doesn’t explain why peace is sometimes uneasy for those who already have.

>> Why is it, that those of us who have received salvation, sometimes find, that peace is still uneasy? We’ll spend the rest of this message trying to answer that question.

Another reason that peace is sometimes uneasy is that ...

2. We need to repent of sin. This is implied at the end of Luke 1:79, “[Jesus came] ...to guide our feet into the path of peace.” The word picture here is that peace is a path. Jesus not only guided us in the past, but He also continues to guide us. He shepherds us and “guides our feet into the path of peace” day after day. But if we chose to leave His path of peace, and to wander into sin, should it really surprise us if we’re finding peace uneasy?¹⁷ In the words of that old hymn, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.”¹⁸ When we have unconfessed sin in our lives, we tend to shy away from God’s presence, and the more we shy away from His presence, the less we enjoy His peace. Straying into sin drives a wedge between us and God.¹⁹ Now, I’m not saying that when Christians sin, we lose our salvation, but when we walk on the path of sin, we forsake the peace that Christ has gained for us, and we diminish our experience of His peace in our lives. So we need to fervently pray that Jesus would guide our feet, back onto His path of peace.²⁰ In other words, our path back to peace is a path of repentance. God’s favor rests on the those who grieve and mourn over their sin. So if you’re a believer who’s fallen into sin, humble yourself, so that God will be pleased with you. Let Jesus guide you back, and restore your feet to His path of peace.

¹⁴ See also John 1:4,5,9.

¹⁵ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1703 footnote on Luke 1:79.

¹⁶ That’s what verse 78 is referring to when it mentions, “the rising sun will come to us from heaven.”

¹⁷ See Psalm 119:165.

¹⁸ Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.

¹⁹ If we’re not feeling at peace in our lives, due to our own sinful choices, then we should realize that God isn’t the one who moved away from us, but we are the ones who’ve distanced ourselves from Him.

²⁰ God’s people are given a loving rebuke in James 4:4-10, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”

So this explains why even some of us who've received salvation, can still find that peace is uneasy, but, it doesn't explain why peace is sometimes uneasy for believers who haven't wandered into sin.

>> Why is it that some of us who've received salvation, and continued to walk on the right path, sometimes find that peace is still uneasy?

Peace is sometimes uneasy because...

3. We need to remove distractions. If you're anything like me, it seems like EVERY year, the Christmas season is one of the busiest times of the year. And this busyness often completely crowds out any sense of "peace on earth." Peace on earth? Peace on earth! I don't have time for peace on earth! I've got way too many things to do, so there's not going to be any peace on my earth! (At least, not until I get all of my Christmas shopping done, and all of my Christmas decorating done, and all of my Christmas baking done, and all of my Christmas cards mailed out! And then, maybe then, I'll find some peace!) Now, none of these things are intrinsically bad; in fact, these things are very good (especially Christmas cookies!). But, when these good things begin to rob our peace, just like they robbed our peace last year, we need to push pause. We need to reevaluate what it truly means to celebrate Jesus' birth; the same Jesus we just read about in Luke 1:79, "[Jesus came] ...to guide our feet into the path of peace." Here's the point, even good things can block our path to peace. This can be true at any time of year, so this danger is not just limited to Christmas time. Anytime we let ourselves get preoccupied with God's good gifts, there's a danger that we'll get distracted from the Giver of those good gifts. It's ironic; and, it's sad, because we end up leaving the path of peace, during the Christmas season.

Recently I've started reading a challenging book by John Piper titled, "A Hunger for God." I'd like to read you a short passage from this book: This section is titled, "God's Greatest Adversaries²¹ Are His Gifts." The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. ...And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when THEY replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable. ...[In Luke 8:14 Jesus warns His followers that] 'as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life.' ...these are not evil in themselves. These are not vices. These are gifts of God. They are...coffee...and decorating...and traveling...and TV-watching...and shopping...And ALL of them can become deadly substitutes for God."²² ²³ Now, I promise you that I'm not trying to be a grinch here. I'm not necessarily saying that we need to put a stop to all of the Christmas decorations, and the Christmas presents, and the sending of Christmas cards, and the baking of Christmas cookies. (Especially that last one, about cookies!) But, I am suggesting that we need to

²¹ "AD ver seh reez"

²² John Piper, *A Hunger for God*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 1997, pp. 14-15.

²³ The story of Mary and Martha comes to mind from Luke 10:38-42.

reevaluate, whether our crazy Christmas frenzy, is robbing us of the very peace that Christmas was meant to bring. And not just rob us of our peace, but also of our connection to the Prince of Peace, to the very Jesus we're trying to celebrate. Brother or Sister in Christ, we need to remove anything that distracts us from God; anything that lures us away from His path of peace.

So, busy distractions are yet another reason that peace is sometimes uneasy; let's consider just one more.

A final reason why peace is sometimes uneasy is that...

4. We need to ratify and reinterpret our suffering. There are multiple sources of suffering in this world. Sometimes it's related to persecution for our faith. Other times it's a matter of God's discipline. Other times we're simply navigating the sickness and death that come with living in a fallen world.²⁴ Regardless of the source of our suffering, suffering can certainly make our peace uneasy. Finding tranquility and inner peace for our souls is particularly challenging when we're in pain, whether that pain is physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual.²⁵ ²⁶ Anyone here going through a time of suffering right now? (I know our family has gone through some suffering this year. 2022 has not been an easy year to remain at peace.) The reality is, hurt, pain, and loss can sometimes bring us to a point of relational crisis with God; making it hard to trust Him. Suffering can lead us to begin questioning God's character, His goodness, or even His existence. We may come to find ourselves disappointed by what God allows in this world. Ultimately, any sense of peace we may have had, decreases in direct proportion to our decreasing faith. This is why we need to ratify and reinterpret our suffering.

Ratify means to give something our official consent or approval. This doesn't mean that we pretend to like our suffering. And it certainly doesn't mean that we don't pray about it; we should absolutely pray about it! But as we talk to God about our suffering, we should always remember to pray a simple, but sometimes difficult, prayer, "thy will be done."²⁷ ²⁸ Rather than allowing our suffering to rob us of our peace, we choose to accept it. And not only to accept it, but to officially approve it; we give it our official consent. That's what we mean by "ratify our suffering." We officially accept God's will for our lives, even though personally, we would have never chosen it. And even though

²⁴ What the book of Revelation calls "the old order of things." Revelation 21:4.

²⁵ Rich Mullins wrote about suffering in his song, "Bound to Come Some Trouble," from his "Never Picture Perfect" album, 1989.

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/richmullins/boundtocomesometrouble.html>

²⁶ Consider Horatio Spafford's classic hymn, "It Is Well with My Soul," 1873, and its origin story.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It_Is_Well_with_My_Soul

²⁷ Consider the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:10 but also God's will in Isaiah 46:10, 53:10, and Acts 2:23.

²⁸ We pray this way because He's the Lord, and we're not. And we pray this because His ways are not our ways. God works in ways that are mysterious to us. Check out Fernando Ortega's song "A Place on the Earth"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxgDTSTBpRE> or read the words to the old hymn "God's Moves in a Mysterious Way"
https://hymnary.org/text/god_moves_in_a_mysterious_way

God absolutely does not need our approval, it's an act of worship when we declare our trust in Him, and officially consent to His greater purposes. It helps us to say it out loud, "Lord, You have every right to do whatever You want to do in my life. Please have Your way in me."²⁹

At the height of Job's suffering, after losing all of his possessions, and all of his children, Job ratifies his suffering. Job 1:20-22 says, "he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.' In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." You see, the Lord is not asking too much from us, when He asks us to trust Him in our suffering. Job openly proclaims that God has the right to give, and to take away.³⁰ In the next chapter his wife gives him some alternative advice. In Job 2:9 she says, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!" But in verse 10 Job replies, "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" Later on as Job's friends are trying to console him and give him advice, Job makes perhaps one of the most stunning statements in all of Scripture. In Job 13:15 he says, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him...." 1 Peter 4:19 agrees, "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." In order to keep our feet on the path of peace, we need to ratify our suffering.

Once we've ratified it, we can then begin to look for God's greater purpose in it. Rather than allowing our suffering to rob us of our peace, we can reinterpret it. Reinterpret means "to revise our understanding of something." In other words, we could interpret our suffering as God's favor no longer resting on us, that He is no longer pleased with us. We could even begin to believe that God no longer cares about us, or that God has forgotten us and forsaken us. But that's not what Scripture teaches; Scripture teaches us to reinterpret our suffering through the lens of God's greater purposes. 1 Peter 1:6-7 explains it this way, "In all this you greatly rejoice³¹, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come SO THAT the proven genuineness of your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."³² So rather allowing our suffering to drag us down and steal our peace, we can allow it to refine our faith and bring God glory.³³ This is part of the process of "becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus." James 1:2-4 explains it this way, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

²⁹ And, by the way, it's also completely appropriate to add a plea for help, "Lord, please sustain me through this tough time of suffering. I won't make it without your help." See 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, "...this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God...."

³⁰ Consider Romans 9:20-21.

³¹ Next Sunday we're going to talk about "Rejoicing When We're Weary."

³² Consider Romans 8:18.

³³ Sometimes the purpose of suffering is to test us, to prove the genuineness of our faith. Consider God's testing of Abraham in Genesis 22:1-18.

because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work SO THAT you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” You see, suffering can be a means for deepening our faith. It may not be the means we would have chosen, but it’s clearly one of the means that God has chosen.³⁴

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, SO THAT we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” In other words, sometimes our suffering becomes the means by which we learn to comfort others in their suffering. Because we’ve experienced tough times ourselves, and God has comforted us and carried us through those times, we then develop an empathy, and an ability to comfort others. This was certainly my own experience early on in our marriage, when Debbie and I went through three consecutive miscarriages. I remember questioning God. I remember being so sad and so angry, and so confused. Few things are as painful as the untimely death of a loved one. In your bulletin today, there’s information about a ministry called GriefShare. If you, or someone you know, has recently suffered the loss of a loved one, I urge you to consider attending one of these support groups. Eventually, through the long and painful process of grieving, Debbie and I learned to trust God more deeply. We received His comfort in incredible ways, and we eventually found our path back to peace. Don’t get me wrong; we still grieve the loss of those three children. And we very much look forward to meeting them in heaven one day. But in the meantime, while we wait, we have learned a little bit more about how to comfort other people in their troubles, and in their losses. We need to reinterpret our suffering, in light of God’s greater purposes.

Brother or Sister in Christ, may the Lord bless you with His peace this week!

³⁴ John the Baptist’s parents must have given up hope long before they got pregnant with John. Surely they must have wondered at some point along the way, “What is God up to!? Why hasn’t he granted us a child? What purpose could our infertility possibly serve!?” Yet through all of their days of sadness and suffering, they went on living by faith and trusting in God. And sure enough, God had a greater purpose and a different timing than they might have ever imagined. This deepening of their faith, over all these years of waiting and trusting, provided John the Baptist with some pretty incredible parents!