

Series: **TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE - December 24, 2011**

PEACE ON EARTH...REALLY?!

Luke 2:1-20

Speaker: Ken Davis

1. Tonight I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes about **peace**. How many of you would like to have a little **peace** in your life? It seems strange, doesn't it, to talk about peace in the middle of all the chaos that seems to surround Christmas. Has anyone here been to the Markville Mall, or Yorkdale Mall in the past few days? How many of you found it to be an experience just filled with peace and goodwill—as it says in the song, you were **greeting smile after smile?** Not so much.

-How many of you came from homes that are filled with peace right about now. Like, everyone's getting along, the decorations are all up—and right this moment, **It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year!!!** How many of you would say, "Uh, maybe not!"

-How many of you have found in driving the roads and highways—that the general theme was, **Let There Be Peace on Earth—and let it begin with me?**

- a. I thought about how often the phrase **Peace on Earth** is used on Christmas cards when the reality is that the Christmas season runs through our lives like a bulldozer through a shopping mall.

-Please understand—I **love** Christmas—but I'm a fellow struggler when it comes to peace. Right now, there is stuff I haven't gotten done yet—and it's like a snooze alarm that goes off ever 9 minutes in my heart. Right now, I have wounded relationships in my life—and they **eat** at me. Right now, on Christmas Eve, I have at least two people I'm close to—that I'm worried about because their future is up for grabs.

-Right now, just under the surface of my life, I see the edges of past failures and stupid mistakes—repented of and forgiven—but still bob to the surface with the slightest encouragement—and **re-shame** me—sabotage my peace and sabotage my joy.

-Does anyone besides me feel the pressure of a list? Stuff I **ought** to have done by now, books I **ought** to be reading, people I **ought** to be contacting, acts of kindness I **ought** to be doing, the message for January 8 that I **should** have gotten done—but they all remain in the **nag** file that **pesters** me: Ken! **Ken! KEN!**

-Now, don't get excited—I'm not going to give you any of the juicy details on this stuff—but can you relate?

- b. And then, of course—as CNN reminds us—there's the world—filled with chaos. Who knows what will happen with Iran—or North Korea—or Afghanistan. This has been a **bloody, unstable** year, hasn't it?

-We live in a **stupidly** violent world. A month or so ago I was with a friend in Pennsylvania who is a Vietnam vet. We've been friends for 25 years, and he has **never** talked about his experience—even with his brothers. When I was there, I put my arm around his shoulder and said, "Sometimes when I look at our daughter, who is ethnically Vietnamese, I think of you. I know what you saw was horrible." His eyes filled with tears and he said, "Ken, it was all so **senseless!** Friends, enemies—they're all just people like you and me.

-We live in a world that **longs** for peace. **Prays** for peace. **Hopes** for peace—and, ironically, fights for it! Most politicians hoping to gain office—or girls hoping to become Miss Something-or-other will say that their greatest wish is for **world peace**. We live in a world that **aches** for peace. So, why don't things get better?

2. What seems strange in all this chaos is that the Christmas cards are right. 2000 years ago, all heaven broke loose with thousands of angels lighting up the night sky—with a message for a bunch of scared shepherds:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.” (Luke 2:14 NIV)

-That sounds **too good to be true**, doesn't it? And with 2000 years having passed—and the world still in chaos, some would think, "Yeah, well maybe they ate some spoiled yogurt! Nothing has changed."

-Maybe it would be helpful to look at the whole account:

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” 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 favour rests.” (Luke 2:1-14 NIV)

- a. Let me give you a little perspective on the world at that time. This all took place, as it says, during the reign of Caesar Augustus—in something called **pax**

Romana—i.e., Roman peace. That simply meant **forced peace**. If you didn't cooperate, you'd get crushed or crucified. And peace had a price tag. Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem registering in a census to make sure Caesar was paid for the soldiers that terrorized their country. So, this was not a joyful, peaceful time to live in the world.

- b. And Joseph and Mary had experienced 9 months of chaos in their lives; with Mary becoming pregnant as an engaged, but unmarried girl—probably about 15 or 16. And it's pretty clear that no one believed her story that God had done this—and she was carrying His Son. That's probably why, in the last month of her pregnancy, she made this trip to Bethlehem with Joseph.

-The level of chaos goes up, not down. I can't imagine **any** first-time Mom who would look forward to giving birth under these circumstances—no doctor, midwife or Mom—just Joseph. And it all happens under very primitive circumstances—and the only place to lay this brand new baby is in a manger. **No one** dreams about something like this for their first child.

- c. There they were—in a place with no friends and no family support. But...hey, it's God's Son, descendant of David, Saviour, the Messiah, **God With Us!** Surely things will look up from here! But, as the narrative continues, we find out that that Mary, Joseph and Jesus will have to run for their lives to escape Herod's soldiers—sent to kill off the competition.
- d. Now, here's my point. I love the song, **Silent Night**—but all is **not** calm and all is **not** bright! Life was tough, lonely and scary. And yet, in the middle of all this, Mary doesn't lose her sense of wonder and peace. —because it says that she pondered on all this—and stored up these memories in her heart. My guess is that the angels words stayed with her: "It's okay! Don't be afraid, Mary, you've found favour with God! You're going to be **just fine!**" I believe they experienced the gift of peace. Know why? Because real peace doesn't come from living under wonderful conditions where everything goes **just right**. Peace is an **inside job**.

-In Mary's case, that was quite literally true. Isaiah had prophesied 700 years earlier:

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. (Isaiah 9:6-7 NIV)

-Jesus, the Saviour, was the **Prince of Peace**. What's fascinating, though, is that while He **brought** peace to thousands in his lifetime—and to millions since—He didn't live a calm, quiet life and die with a smile on his face and money in the bank. He was rejected and executed—nailed naked to a cross where people watched and jeered until he was dead. Ironically, Isaiah--the same prophet who prophesied about **Who** he was—**also** prophesied that outcome:

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5 NIV)

3. This was **very** hard for Jesus' followers—and maybe even Mary—to understand. He was a **Saviour**—but, in the best understood meaning of that term—He **didn't** save his people. He was the **Prince of Peace**—but the Romans, as part of their **Pax Romana** policy—levelled Jerusalem 40 years after Jesus was executed.

-That messed with people's heads—because they thought that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, would use His power to crush and intimidate enemies into living peacefully with each other! That he would use his power to feed people—so they didn't have to worry about having enough; that he would use his power to make sure mothers took care of their children and people were paid fair wages and oppression was stopped for good.

-And **that**, friends—is the way our world system thinks about peace; that peace comes from our circumstances, from other people getting their act together and cooperating. **We** think that way, don't we?

*I could have peace in my neighbourhood if only my neighbours would get their act together, stop the parties, and be decent!

*I could have peace where I work if only my boss weren't such a jerk—and if people could see me and my talents for the true gift I am to the office!

*We could have peace in our family...if only. I could be at peace in my marriage, if only... I wouldn't be so worked up inside if only we could get our house paid off and I made more money... You could say it like this; **I will have peace...when...!** When what? When the planets align and you hit the age of Aquarius? When everyone sees how brilliant and insightful you really are so you don't have to prove it? When everyone understands how **right** you are—and that you always **have** been right? When people of other cultures just settle down and stop fussing about the lifestyle we can afford?

-Do you see what's going on? We think that peace comes from **outside** circumstances—that you can actually **force** it to happen if you have the bigger gun. This was actually the philosophy behind Colt firearms when they created the Colt **Peacemaker [pic]**. It was a massive .45 handgun that was developed for the military—and also used by lawmen to **tame** the West in the late 1800's. The problem is—the **Peacemakers** got into the hands of the **peace-disrupters**—who used them freely!

-Do you see the problem? A **forced** peace is only a sullen, resentful **ceasefire**. Ceasefires only cause hatred and resentment to go underground. Like infections, they fester, kill—and erupt somewhere else.

-A lot of times, people think, “If God is God—all-powerful and good—why doesn’t He just **end all war** and **make** us get along!” To do that—he’d have to kill off a lot of people—me included. Know why? Peace doesn’t come by forcing people, against their will, to kiss and make up. **Peace doesn’t come from the outside—and work itself in—it comes from the inside and works its way out. That, friends, is the way to lasting peace—not just a ceasefire.**

- a. Peace doesn’t come because it’s Christmas. I mean, Christmas is an **amazing** time of year, really, but in and of itself, it won’t create peace in your home when all the relatives show up tomorrow! And it won’t make your kids get along after you’ve opened up your presents. Peace doesn’t come when you meet “Mr. Right” and get rid of “Mr. Wrong. It doesn’t come from getting the job you’ve always dreamed of, or starving yourself into the body you’ve always dreamed you could have. It doesn’t come from having a ton of friends who think you’re wonderful—and light up your relational world. It doesn’t even come from the report that the shadow in the X-ray isn’t cancer. And it won’t come when and if the economy recovers. Peace is an **inside job!**
- b. See, people in our world think that peace comes when you drop enough bombs, or intimidate enemies into peace agreements. Some people think that peace will come when the last gun is removed from the world. John Lennon thought that there would be peace when the world rid itself of religion—as did Christopher Hitchens. Some people think that peace will come by creating a political party that unites everyone.

-Do you understand the message Jesus came with? Peace does **not** come from the outside...in! It’s an **inside** job—that starts with the Prince of Peace taking up residence in our lives—and us simply bringing that peace to all the places where we show up?

-Have you ever met someone who has an angry, chaotic heart—and everywhere they go—that have this agitating influence? God wants people who will spread peace—at work, on highways, in their home—wherever.

4. It’s important to understand that Jesus’ coming as the **Prince of Peace** started with love; with God choosing to love, redeem and restore us and all He’s made. What God communicated through Jesus, Prince of Peace, was, **I want you! ALL of you!** Remember how John put it? God so **loved**—He gave us His Son. Peace—**real** peace always starts with love.

*That’s why Jesus would grow up to tell people to **love their enemies**. How many of you think you can maybe find peace with your enemies when you still hate them? Jesus said that **love** would be the trademark of his people—not being right, not being radical, not being disruptive—but being outrageously loving. Peace flows from love—not from wanting an easier life.

-The second factor in making peace is humility—and it’s **all through** this story of Jesus’ birth. Think about it. John says that the **Word**—his description of the Son—was with God in the beginning—and that all things were made **through** him. And

yet...He set all his power aside and came to us as a baby--tiny, naked, vulnerable and needy. Nothing even **close** to this had ever happened before—or since.

-Humility is always a part of finding peace—and making peace. God, by sending Jesus to show us what He's really like and make a way for us to come to Him, was saying, ***I want you!*** For us, the corresponding words are, ***I need you!*** And ***that's*** the truth. We do need Him! Jesus made it clear in his life that He had the power to bring peace. To people who had lived scandalous lives—He brought the peace of being accepted, loved and forgiven. There were times when he commanded fierce storms to just **stop**—and they did.

-When people struggled with need and were anxious about where the next meal would come from—or what the future would hold, He said, “Did you know that you have a Father in Heaven—who has more power than you can imagine—and loves you more than you would ever dream. ***Trust Him!***” And those who did found peace.

-To people who think that peace is found in a better job or more cooperative people—you know, something outside, Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble! But that's okay—***I have overcome the world!***” And He offered peace. His peace. Peace and life that continues—even when times get rough!

- a. Let me tell you what that means tonight. It means that peace is a choice. And the **first** choice is peace with God—the One who orchestrated this whole event we simply know as...***Christmas***. The point of Christmas is not to have a wonderful, colourful celebration in the bleak of winter. The point of Christmas is that God moved **first** in offering peace and relational wholeness and life by humbling Himself—even to the point of death on a cross.

-Christmas means that we can know for certain that God has forgiven us; that the Prince of Peace, through the powerful Spirit of God—comes to actually live us in us—and that He brings peace and life with him. Remember, ***peace is an inside job***.

- b. But this takes our cooperation. God **loves** us—but we have to allow ourselves to be loved. God humbled Himself—to come to us; and we have to humble ourselves to come to Him. God says, ***I want you!*** We say, ***I need you!***

-It takes some time to learn how to live with this peace God offers—and how to access it when life get's chaotic. But, I'm telling you, it's real. I know. I've experienced it—and I'm still learning to experience it. It's a peace and wholeness that just continues to give life—even when life sucks! It's a sense of being loved and accepted—even when you're right in the middle of rejection. And it's ours for the asking!

5. So, what about the ***peace on earth*** the angels promised? Is it just an internal, subjective thing? Absolutely not. God sends people with the Prince of Peace at the core of their lives to be ***peacemakers***.

-And it starts with re-writing the script of your life—where, instead of waiting for circumstances to be right or waiting for someone else to make peace—you **choose** peace. And you can't choose peace without choosing to love. Like, not just **saying** you love—but **acting** in love, **speaking** in love.

-And peacemaking always starts with humility. This is tough, isn't it? But if you want peace in some circumstance of your life where there's war—you'll have to set aside your pride—and, like Jesus, be vulnerable and small and weak.

-But you also have to lay down your weapons. God's weapon against us was our sin and failure. He chose to not hold it against us—and at tremendous cost to Himself—made forgiveness and reconciliation possible. So, what's your weapon?

- a. We all have weapons, you know. The most obvious weapons are the lists--grudges, hatred, and bitterness. If you want peace, you have to lay that stuff down. I mean, you get that don't you? It means that if you want peace with your parents, your **ex**, your boss—you have to **choose** to stop blaming, talking about them, and doing spiteful things.
- b. But there are less obvious weapons. Like—**the need to be right**. Or the need to control—and make everyone fit into your plans. Image can be a weapon.

6. If you want peace with God—well, He's already made the first move. He laid everything on the line to offer peace. That's why He's the **Prince of Peace**. And when he gives us peace—His calling on our lives is for **us** to then make the first move toward peace—and it keeps moving out and through the world from there.

-Where do **you** need peace tonight? Would you move **toward** it? Would you take just one small step? Everyone **loves** peace, **hopes** for peace, **craves** peace—but not many want to **make** peace! Too messy. Too humiliating. Too costly. Too risky. But God did. And now He offers it to you and me. We receive peace—it's an **inside job**—done by the power of God. And then we become **peacemakers**. And **that's** how peace comes. It's not a pipe dream. It's an inside job—from God—to us—to the world. See, God didn't create the chaos in the world—we did. And that's why, if peace is ever going to be a reality in our world, it will come from the hearts of ordinary people. Like me...and like you. And it will move through this world—from heart to heart to heart.

-If **you** want peace—you can have it tonight. Peace is a choice that is always there. That Christmas night 2000 years ago, God made His move. Now—it's mine. And yours.