

The Gospel of Luke

“Prince of Peace”

December 24, 2023

1. Intro

- a. Over two thousand years ago, a group of lowly shepherds were watching over their flocks during the night
 - i. It was the shepherds’ job to protect these sheep from thieves and wild animals, for these were very likely the lambs that would be used in the sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem
 1. According to the Jewish Mishnah, which contains oral traditions passed on from those days, these highly valued lambs were kept in the area known as Migdal Eder, which is translated as “Tower of the Flock”
 - a. Migdal Eder, just a short walk from the much more well-known town, of Bethlehem
 2. While these lambs were highly valued by the religious leaders of the people of Israel, their shepherds were not
 - a. In the Jewish literature written around this time period, it was recorded that shepherds were “dishonest men,” and that they were “prone to violating Jewish law”
 - b. The Jewish historian, Philo, wrote that shepherds were to be held as “inferior and inglorious”
 - i. What a tragic statement on the condition of those days, when men created in the image of God were seen as inferior to a bunch of little lambs
 3. But these were the circumstances in which they lived
 - a. And so these shepherds, despised by the religious elite, were faithfully guarding and protecting these lambs that night, just as they had done for countless nights before
 - i. But on this night, their lives would be changed, FOREVER!
 - b. We find these shepherds in Luke chapter 2, verse 8, if you will go ahead and turn there in your Bibles
 - i. Luke has an interesting way of writing about the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ
 1. Chapter 1 of his Gospel gives us a HUGE build-up for the entrance of the Son of God into this world
 - a. We read of Zechariah’s vision in the Temple, where Gabriel told him of the birth of his son, John the Baptist, who would prepare the way for the Messiah
 - b. We read of Gabriel’s visit to young Mary, to give her the news that God had incredibly chosen her to bear the Son of God in her womb
 - c. We read of two of the great hymns contained in Luke’s Gospel, Mary’s “Magnificent” and Zechariah’s “Benedictus”
 - i. Hymns which we will revisit in the weeks to come
 2. So we get this elaborate prologue in the 80 verses of chapter 1, and then just a simple declaration in verses 6 and 7 of chapter 2...
 - a. *⁶And while they were there [in Bethlehem], the time came for [Mary] to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*
 4. Luke is an amazing historian, and really a great storyteller, but for whatever reason, the moment that the Son of God is born gets relatively little attention
 - a. It’s almost as if that was a moment that was far too holy and reverent for Luke to put into words
 - i. But that doesn’t mean Luke was silent about other things that were going on at that time, which brings us back to the shepherds in Migdal Eder...

b. Luke 2:8-13

i. ⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

1. Can you imagine?!

a. I don't know what sheep are like during the middle of the night, but I would guess that things were usually pretty quiet for these shepherds as they kept watch through the night

b. And all of a sudden, the dark skies were lit up with the glory of the Lord, and an angel appeared before them

i. We don't know if this was Gabriel again, but whichever angel it was, this whole scene sent these poor shepherds into absolute terror

1. I think that's pretty understandable!

ii. So it makes sense that the first words of this angel to the shepherds were "Fear not!"

1. Fear not, for I bring you good news of great joy that will be for ALL the people

a. This good news is not just for King Herod and his royal court

b. This good news is not just for the religious rulers in Jerusalem

c. This good news is for ALL people, even the lowly and despised shepherds

i. Just stop and think about it for a moment... the previous announcements of the coming birth of the long awaited Messiah had only been reserved for Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Mary and Joseph

ii. And the very next people who receive this gloriously good news are a bunch of shepherds out in a field?

d. This is good news of GREAT joy for ALL people!

2. And what is this good news of great joy?

a. Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ, THE LORD!

ii. We don't know the theological backgrounds of these shepherds, but I think its fairly safe to assume that their training and education was probably pretty low

1. So they may not have been aware that the prophet Micah had foretold this very event nearly 7 centuries earlier

a. In Micah 4:8, we hear these words,

i. ⁸And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.

1. Tower of the Flock... Migdal Eder

a. On YOUR hills, the King shall come!

b. And then in Micah 5:2,

i. ²But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

c. 700 years before this incredible night, Micah foretold that the hills of Migdal Eder would receive the King

i. And from the little town of Bethlehem, a Ruler shall come forth, whose coming is from old, from ancient days

1. Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ, THE LORD!
2. But this King would not be arriving in the royal parade that he deserved
 - a. He would not be riding in on a gallant white horse, surrounded by the host of heaven, as he should have arrived
 - i. No, this King would arrive in the most unexpected of ways, as the angel would go on to say...
 1. *¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.*
 - ii. Look back in your worship guide at the lyrics to “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”
 1. Charles Wesley captured this moment beautifully in the second verse...
 - a. Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!” Christ, by highest heaven adorned, Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of a Virgin’s womb;
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to appear, Jesus, our Emmanuel here.
 - b. Veiled in flesh, the Godhead would come as a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths
 - c. The incarnate Deity, was pleased to come to man as an infant, lying in a manger
 - b. And with the announcement of this stunning declaration, the sky was filled with the multitude of the heavenly host
 - i. And this heavenly host was doing exactly what they have done from the day that they were created, and even still today...
 1. They were PRAISING God!
 - a. And in their praise, we find the third hymn of Luke’s Gospel, the “Gloria in Excelsis Deo”
 - i. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!”
3. My friends, this is the pinnacle of all that Christ came to this earth to accomplish
 - a. Yes, he came to bring us salvation for our sin
 - b. Yes, he came to cancel the powers of sin and death
 - c. Yes, he came to defeat our great enemy Satan with his death upon the cross
 - i. But, ULTIMATELY, the Son of God came to us, veiled in human flesh, to bring GLORY to his Father
 1. Glory to God in the highest
4. AND, on earth, peace among those with whom He is pleased
 - a. That is the way the ESV translation has it... peace among those with whom He is pleased
 - i. If you have the King James Version, you might see the more traditional reading of this verse, “And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”
 - b. The most consistent reading of these words, however, is “Peace among men to whom it is God’s good pleasure to give it”
 - i. For God is God, and, according to Philippians 2:13, it is HE who works in us, both to will and to work for HIS good pleasure
 - c. And so it is to this peace that we now turn
5. As we read together at the beginning of the service, to us a child is born, to us a son is given
 - a. And one of the wonderful titles he is given in Isaiah 9 is Prince of Peace

- i. And Isaiah says, "of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end"
 - b. So what is this peace that the Prince of Peace has given to us?
 - i. We certainly live in a day and age in which peace is something that the world could use
 1. So knowing what this peace is that God Himself has given to us is pretty important, isn't it?
 6. The first way we will define this peace of God is to look at what it is NOT
 2. What this peace IS NOT
 - a. First, this peace that Christ has brought to us is NOT a peace from all wars
 - i. We can look all throughout history and see that this is NOT the peace that Christ brought with him
 1. If we just look at the immediate context into which Jesus was born, we that this is the case
 - a. Christ came during a time when the Jewish people were ruled by the pagan emperors of Rome
 - i. They were heavily taxed
 - ii. Their lands were occupied by Roman soldiers
 - iii. Any freedoms that they might have had could be taken away at any moment at the whim of the various Caesars
 - b. This was the world into which Jesus was born
 - i. And it would be less than three decades after his death that Roman soldiers would surround the city of Jerusalem, destroy the Temple that Herod had built, and send many of the Jewish people into slavery or exile
 - c. In the immediate context of the history of Israel, Jesus clearly did not come to bring peace from war
 2. But if there was any doubt about this, Jesus himself said in Matthew 24:6-8
 - a. *⁶And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*
 - b. These birth pains have continued on throughout the history of our world, haven't they?
 - i. And they will continue on until Christ returns, and he sends out his angels to gather his people from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other
 - ii. Christ came to this earth to bring peace, but NOT a peace from war
 - b. Second, neither did he come to bring us peace in all of our relationships
 - i. This is what the world would like for us to believe, isn't it?
 1. They would say to the Christian, "If you truly acted the way Jesus acted, you would just love on everyone and accept them for who they are."
 - a. In their opinion, if the church would bring anyone and everyone into the fold, regardless of their beliefs or lifestyle, THEN the world would experience more peace and harmony and goodwill
 - i. That's what Jesus taught, right? Or is it?
 - ii. Well, we simply have to look to Jesus' own words to answer this argument...
 1. In Matthew 10:34-39, Jesus gives us these sobering words,
 - a. *³⁴"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*
 2. Those are hard words for us to hear, aren't they?

- a. But for our brothers and sisters across the world, they aren't just words – they are a reality of life
 - i. In the Sudan, in China, in Burkina Faso... the reality is that when someone turns from the pagan religions of these lands, and surrenders their heart and their life to Jesus Christ, the sword is exactly what they experience
 - 1. Many new believers in these countries are imprisoned by their own family members
 - 2. Many new Christians – young, old, men, or women – are mutilated by their own neighbors for turning to Christ
 - 3. Many in these countries who find their life in Christ, lose their life for his sake
 - a. And Jesus would look upon them and say, “YOU are worthy of me”
 - 3. Jesus did not come to bring us peace in all of our relationships, but rather, a sword
- c. Third, Jesus did not come to bring us peace in our circumstances
 - i. In John 16, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure that would be soon to come
 - 1. What a confusing time that must have been for them
 - a. They had followed Jesus for three years
 - i. They had seen him perform incredible miracles
 - ii. They had seen him defy the religious elite in Jerusalem
 - iii. They had heard him preach and teach about the coming of the Kingdom of God
 - b. And now, Jesus is telling them that he must leave them
 - i. In our hearts, we would hope that Jesus would say, “But don't worry, my friends. I will send the Holy Spirit to you, and he will make sure that you have perfect health, that your bank accounts would be overflowing with abundance, and that you will prosper in everything you do.”
 - 1. Isn't that the message we hear in so many of our churches today?
 - ii. But that's not what Jesus said, is it?
 - c. No, in verse 33, he said,
 - i. *³³I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*
 - 2. Friends, in this world, you WILL have tribulation
 - a. The early church experienced this firsthand as they proclaimed Christ as the one and only Lord in the midst of the Roman Empire
 - i. Many of them immediately lost their jobs and their sources of income
 - ii. Many became ostracized from their homes and communities
 - iii. Many found themselves poor, rejected, and considered no better than the beggars and the lepers
 - 1. They experienced firsthand what Jesus had promised for all who would take up their cross and follow him
 - a. In this world, you WILL have tribulation
 - ii. Well, this is not very good news for us this morning, is it?
 - 1. Isn't the peace and goodwill toward men that we sing about this time of year supposed to be a bit more chipper than everything we've just heard?
 - a. If Christ's coming to us as a baby in a manger doesn't bring us peace from warfare, or peace in our relationships, or peace in all our circumstances, what kind of peace DID he bring?!
 - 3. The answer is that Christ has brought to us a peace that we are utterly incapable of making on our own
 - a. And that is peace with our Heavenly Father
 - i. Do you understand, my friends, that apart from Jesus, we are ALL enemies of God?
 - 1. The message of the Scriptures is NOT that we are all mostly good people, and as long as you don't murder anyone or do anything REALLY bad, God will let you into heaven

- a. No... the clear message of the Bible is this:
 - i. God created mankind in His image, and placed the first man and the first woman – Adam and Eve – in a place of unparalleled paradise and perfection
 - ii. He gave Adam and Eve dominion over all of Creation, commanding them to be fruitful and multiply, and to spread His glory over the entire earth
 - iii. The one law that He gave to them was simple: don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
 - 1. Everything else in this place of beauty and peace was theirs, except for this one tree
 - iv. But that was all it took, wasn't it?
 - 1. Satan, the tempter, entered into the Garden, twisting the words of God, feeding lies to his people, and enticing them to give in to the desire of ALL of our hearts:
 - a. To sit on the throne of our own lives
 - v. Sin entered the world as Adam and Eve gave in to their desires
 - vi. And as a result, the human race that would come in the thousands of years that would follow would ALL be born into sin
 - 1. In Adam, death and depravity and destruction came into the world
 - 2. And darkness came into our hearts
 - vii. This is the condition that we all find ourselves in, without exception
 - viii. Because we are ALL in Adam – we have ALL descended from his line – we are ALL sinners
 - 1. Sure, you might be able to look at the guy down the road and say, "Well, at least I'm not as bad as HE is"
 - 2. But when you stand before the perfectly righteous and holy God of all Creation, you will have no ground to stand upon
 - 3. In the face of His awesome might and excellence and perfection, all the sin that exists in your own heart will be magnified a thousandfold, and you will fall to your knees and say with the prophet Isaiah, "Woe is me, for I am LOST!"
 - a. And you will finally realize the awful truth of who you are
 - i. You are an enemy of God Almighty
- b. Which is why we are ALL in desperate need of someone to go before us, to bring PEACE between us and our God
 - i. And THAT is exactly what Jesus has done!
 - 1. When we look at the history contained in our Bibles, we read of the incredible story of how God chose a pagan man out of the pagan nation of the Chaldeans
 - a. Through this one man, Abraham, God would form for Himself a people
 - i. From Abraham would come Isaac
 - 1. From Isaac would come Jacob
 - a. From Jacob would come twelve sons
 - i. From these 12 sons, the 12 Tribes of Israel would eventually come forth
 - b. A chosen nation, picked by God
 - i. Not because they earned it or deserved it
 - ii. But simply by the good pleasure of God, for the glory of His own name
 - b. Isn't that incredible?!
 - i. That God would choose for himself a sinful, rebellious, stiff-necked people, and He would say to them, "You are MINE. I will be your God, and I will dwell among YOU."

1. Even when the people of Israel failed to follow God as He commanded, over and over and over again, He repeatedly brought them back to Himself, over and over and over again
 - a. Not because of their faithfulness
 - b. But because of His own steadfast love
- ii. But what the Scriptures show us is that this is only half of the story
 1. For God had a secret plan... a mystery that no one could have ever conceived in their own mind... a mystery that was revealed in the life and death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ
- iii. Turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians, chapter 2
 1. You can find Ephesians about midway in your New Testament, after Galatians, and before Philipians
 - a. In this chapter, Paul is writing to the Christians in Ephesus, praising God for His grace that has brought to them salvation
 - i. He writes of God's love and mercy that He has shown to us in Christ
 - ii. How, when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us ALIVE in Christ
 1. But then he goes on in verse 11 to remind the Ephesian believers of who they were BEFORE Jesus
 - a. For they were NOT God's people – they were Gentiles, OUTSIDE of the promise given to the people of Israel
 - b. Look at what Paul says to them...
 2. Ephesians 2:11-22
 - a. *¹¹Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— ¹²remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*
- c. My friends, THIS is the good news of great joy that the angels brought on that first Christmas night!!
 - i. In Christ Jesus, we who were separated from God, and separated from all of the covenants that God had made with Israel – we have now been brought near by the blood of Christ!
 1. Christ has become our peace, breaking down the wall that divided the people of God from all the rest of the world
 - a. Through the peace of Christ, we have been reconciled to God
 - b. Through the peace of Christ, we have access in one Spirit to our Father
 - c. Through the peace of Christ, we have become the very dwelling place of God!!
 - i. As Paul said, we were a people with no hope, but now we have hope
 - ii. We were a people with no God, but now we are a people of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob
 - iii. We who were once far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ
 1. For he himself is our PEACE!
 - d. The good news does not get any better than that, does it?

- i. We who were once enemies of God, are now his sons and daughters
 - 1. Not because we were good enough to make the cut
 - 2. But because of His great mercy
 - a. Because of His great love
 - b. Because of His great grace
- e. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to those to whom it is God's good pleasure to give it
 - i. For this peace is not given to all men
 - ii. This peace is given to those who repent from their sin, and turn from their rebellion against God, and fall to their knees in full surrender
 - iii. This peace is given to those who look to the Son of God and say to him, "YOU are the Lord of my life. In you and you alone, do I place ALL my hope, and ALL my trust, and ALL my faith."
 - 1. It is to these that Isaiah gives this promise in Isaiah 26:3
 - a. ³You keep him in PERFECT peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you
 - i. In the midst of wars and rumors of wars, if we are in Christ, we can have peace
 - ii. In the midst of relational hardships and difficulties, if we are in Christ, we can have peace
 - iii. In the midst of ANY trial or tribulation, if we are in Christ, we can have peace
 - 1. For the blood of Christ has brought us near
 - a. Therefore, Christian, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus!