



TIME OF GRACE®

Simply Christmas: The Price of Peace

Study Notes

Summary

There are many classic songs of the Christmas season, but nothing quite matches the first song of Christmas, the song of the angels in Bethlehem. Their lyrics are few, but their meaning is profound. God's favor. Peace on earth. Glory to him on high!

- Christmas is a time for _____.
- **Luke 2:13:** Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying . . .
- "Heavenly Host = Angelic _____.
- **Romans 7:22,23:** ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

James 4:1: What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

- **Isaiah 9:6:** 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.

Isaiah 9:4-6: ⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. ⁶ 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.

- **John 19:33,34:** ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.
- **Revelation 19:11-16:** ¹¹ I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.

¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

- **Luke 2:13,14:** ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”
- **Zephaniah 3:17:** The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.

Points to Ponder

1. Brainstorm as many Bible passages as you can that use the language of war (battle, fight, sword, shield, captive, defeat, victory, etc.). Which passage is the most powerful for you as you fight against temptation each day?
2. Study Revelation 19:11-16, which depicts Jesus as the triumphant warrior/king. List three details of John’s description that make Jesus a powerful and comforting Savior.
3. Invite someone (or a bunch of someones!) to join you at church on Christmas Eve.

Homework for Next Week

Read Luke 2:15-20.

*“The Christmas Promise is this: We have a Savior and his name is Jesus.”
—Max Lucado*

Time of Grace Ministry
Simply Christmas: The Price of Peace
Luke 2:13
December 22, 2019

Pastor Mike Novotny

So if you had to finish the sentence here on the screen with just one word, what word would you pick? Christmas is a time for blank.

If I gave you just one second to think it in the back of your head, could you come up with a one-word answer? Alright, let's take a church quiz. How many of you said that Christmas is a time for joy? Show of hands; oh yeah, about a third of you. How about Christmas is a time for peace? Any winners? I see one; maybe two. Christmas is a time for love. Three? Six? Christmas is a time for family? Christmas is a time for presents? The children? No, alright, I guess we don't have to get you anything. How about Christmas is a time for Jesus? Does that sound good to any Christians in the house? Yeah, how many of you - show of hands - picked the answer that I have here on the screen: Christmas is a time for war. Yeah, exactly; it doesn't sound exactly right, does it? And I wouldn't have picked that answer either. Actually, there was a woman last Sunday who works in retail who told me that at the mall, Christmas is a time for war - either fighting for parking spots, your place in line.

I don't think I ever would have picked that in my top 10, maybe top 25, until I went back and read the classic Christmas story. You know, Luke 2, if you're new to the Bible, is like the classic retelling of the birth of Christmas. It's the famous story of when Caesar Augustus issued a decree and Mary and Joseph went down to Bethlehem and a time came for the baby to be born. It's the story where there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby; keeping watch over their flocks. An angel appeared and said, "Don't be afraid; I have good news of great joy that's for all the people." But did you know right in the middle of that classic Christmas story is the proof that Christmas is actually a time for war? And today, I want to tell you that story; a new fresh angle on Christmas. An angle that I had never really seen in my almost 40 years as a Christian until I looked with fresh eyes at this story and one verse - in fact, just one word - helped open a whole new dimension to make me see and appreciate Christmas in a whole new way. So today, I just want to spend most of my time on a single verse and zero in on that single word so that you'd realize that Christmas is a time for war and because it is, you can have lasting peace in your heart.

Alright, here's the verse I'm going to show you. It's from Luke 2; we're looking at verse 13 today. It says, "Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel praising God and saying," - did you see it? If you know the story, there was one angel bringing the good news to the shepherds that a Savior had been born. And then like a light switch, a great company, a thousand thousand-watt lightbulbs fill out the sky. The angels appear and they're about to praise God and sing. But do you notice how Luke described that great company of angels? He called them the heavenly host. Now you shouldn't ever read a Bible passage without

asking about each word, "What does that mean?" So let me ask you the question, the word "host," what does that mean? I asked a whole bunch of Christians that question the past week - I mean, longtime Christians, theologically educated Christians - if they could tell me what the word "host" meant in the Christmas story and do you know how many of them got it right? Zero. And I don't blame them because the way we use the word "host" in modern English is very different than the way it was used in ancient Bible times. And when you think of the word "host," what comes to mind? Like you're hosting a Christmas party, right? You're entertaining family and friends. A comedian might host a celebrity award show and entertains the people in their seats. You might know in the year 2026, the United States is hosting the World Cup soccer tournament, which is good news that will cause great joy for all of God's; all of God's people. When you're a host, there are guests who come in and you welcome them and you're warm to them and you love them. But that's not what the word used to mean. I think what happened is in the old King James translation of the Bible, the word "host" was used over 200 times and people grasped what it meant. Except when they translated it and updated the Christmas story, it was so iconic and classic, they didn't want to mess with the wording and so they left it as the "heavenly hosts," not to mess with the songs and the lyrics. Except, we changed the English usage of the word and so we don't exactly know what it means. But today, I'm going to tell you.

If you're taking notes in your program, the word "host" literally in the Greek that Luke uses in this verse means "army." A host in ancient English was an army so when the heavenly hosts showed up, an angelic army appeared in the sky. So if in your mind when you think about the Christmas story you're picturing like those chubby baby angels, right, with the diaper, the trumpet - like that's totally, totally wrong. If you picture angels who kind of look like me, like frail, like they would have gotten their heads dunked in toilets during their middle school years, like, totally wrong. No, instead you should think of like broad shouldered, barrel chested, black ops soldiers marching off to war.

I was talking to a guy from our church earlier, Tim - where's Tim? Hey, Tim, in the back there, can you stand up? Everyone look at Tim - think of that! On the night that baby Jesus, meek and mild and tender in the manger is laying, 1,000 angels like that show up and light up the sky. And the question I ask myself when I defined that word was, "Why?" Like why would Luke drop some war lingo right in the middle of this peaceful, joyful, Christmas story? It's not what we think about with the emotion of Christmas, right? Why didn't he say a great company of the heavenly choir appeared because they're about to praise God and sing glory to God in the highest heaven. Why would he choose to mention the army? And to answer that question, I need to tell you something really, really important about the Bible. When the Bible tries to convince you how incredible Jesus is, like so incredible that you should worship him and give up everything to follow him, it chooses to use a number of different metaphors and images and pictures that are all meant to spark an emotion in your heart and make you appreciate Jesus. So for example, sometimes the Bible will talk about Jesus as a Good Shepherd and you're a sheep in his flock. And the pictures of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, he leads you to these really green, soft pastures and there's like quiet waters and this bubbling brook and there's a beautiful blue sky and the sun's coming down and you're defenseless but he's the Good Shepherd and he's going to fight off all the wolves and what emotion does that spark in your heart? Ahhh. Right? You know it's going to be okay. Like, there's peace, there's a rest, you can relax, you can close your eyes because Jesus is with you.

In another image, Jesus is called like the Groom and all Christians are like his bride, the church. And if you've ever been in a relationship, you know the emotion that that sparks; when someone is interested in you, like how your heart gets excited. When they pursue you, when they love you, when they want to spend time with you, when they make a commitment to you, when they'll sacrifice for you, when they're with you in the ups and downs, the sickness, the health, the better, the worse, it just makes you feel loved and safe and protected. That's Jesus, the Groom, to his church.

But there's another metaphor in the Bible that's a little bit more gritty and graphic and it's the language of war; that God is a warrior and he fights for his people. If you've read much of the Bible, you might know these metaphors are everywhere in the Scriptures. You know, "fight the good fight," and "put on the armor of God" and "take up the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit." There's so many passages about battles and boots and blood and spears and swords and shields and cities with walls and gates and bars. There's victory, there's conquests, there's defeat, there's chains, and slaves, and captives and people who are being set free; that metaphors throughout the Bible and it's the metaphor that Luke brings up at Christmas. And I want you to think of the emotion that that kind of language sparks. And those of you who've served in the armed forces, or if you have someone close in your family who has, you know what it is. When there is war and battle, when there's a real enemy that's trying to kill you, there's incredible fear and there's incredible relief when the enemy is conquered. Like when you're not just going to have your taxes go up but somebody's going to kill you or take your family captive. If you might not live to see your family and friends or kiss your own children again, like there's incredible fear when you go into battle. But when the enemy is defeated - whoa. I think of the end of the world wars; just how the nations rejoiced that the threat was gone and that the enemy was conquered. Like that's the kind of imagery that Luke wants to bring into the Christmas story.

But it still begs the question "why?" I mean, this is about beautiful Mary and her tender child. This is Silent Night and little Jesus in the manger; this isn't like Braveheart and Jesus with face paint and a broad sword in his crib. Why in the world would Luke bring that imagery into the story? And I think you might know the answer to that question if you give it a little thought because isn't it true that Christmas is the time when we have to fight? I mean, not just some terrorist enemies out there on the other side of the world but we have to fight against so much temptation right here in our hearts. There is no Christmas "break" when it comes to fighting sin and so many of us during these days of Christmas, we have to go to war because so much is at stake. Like if we say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing or give into the wrong temptation, it will enslave us, wrap us in chains, and kill our faith. I think about the words that some of the apostles wrote about in the New Testament. Like the apostle Paul, he described that war this way in Romans 7. He said, "In my inner being, I delight in God's law. But I see another law at work in me; raging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me." Paul was like, "I delight in my heart. I delight in the law of God. Like, I want to do what God says; I want to love him more than anything else and then I want to love people as much as God loves me.

But, Paul admits there's something else happening here and it's a fight like to actually think about God that way; to actually treat people that way. And, you know, so Paul admits like he's a

prisoner; he's not winning that war. He's been a Christian, for what, 25 years when he writes the book of Romans and after all that time and all those sermons and all the Scriptures that he himself wrote, he admitted like there was a war happening in his heart. Jesus' younger brother, James, said the same thing. He said in James 4: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" He says, "You know why we're in this war? Because there are these desires that all of us have in the human heart and it is a brutal battle." And I hate to be the bearer of bad news at Christmastime, but in the next 48 hours, you are going to have the fight. For many of you, the battle in your hearts will be jealousy. As you see everyone else's Christmas on social media, as you open the gifts with many other people, it will be hard not to envy what other people get or what other people have. When your brother or sister or best friend gets like the incredible gift and they're so happy and you didn't get the one thing you wanted, it will be hard to be content and rejoice that God is with you. When you have some time off of work and you're scrolling on social media and you see some friends from work or members of your family and they're getting a tan in the Caribbean while you're shoveling a driveway in Wisconsin, it's going to be hard to believe that God has been good to you. When some of you who are in sales, you get to the end of the calendar year and you're not meeting your metrics or your numbers, it is going to be hard like to be content and trust in God and not flip out with fear and panic and worry. When you host a Christmas party and everyone comes - the family members you like and the ones you don't; the ones you're good with and the one that there's tension - it will be a battle to actually love them and not pick and choose who you're going to be nice to this Christmas. When there are so many opportunities to indulge, it will be a battle to say "no" to more food, to more drink, to not getting intoxicated, to not getting high, to not spending money you don't have. It's going to be a fight to not be impatient and not to be selfish; not to drop a "should" bomb on the people who are around you at Christmas. You know, this is how the holidays "should" be and this is the time we "should" leave for the party and this is how much money we "should" spend this Christmas. It will be so hard not to think that what you want for Christmas is the standard that everyone else has to submit to. That will be a fight in all of our hearts.

And even if you show up here on Christmas Eve, you will have to battle. Like not just to sing the songs and be a critic about whether your favorites were chosen for the set. Not to just go through the motions and check the church box but actually to worship God - not just say the word "worship" - but ascribe great worth to him in your heart, you will have to fight with your distracted mind to actually see and savor and treasure Jesus.

See, that's the hard part about the holidays. There are desires and they rage war in our hearts. And you can be like Paul, decades into your walk with Jesus, and the fight does not get easy because your enemy, the devil, will never wave a white flag. He will not give you a Christmas break. He's been tempting you for your entire life and he knows where the walls are weak and crumbling and he's going to come at you. Like if you don't struggle with sexual sin, he won't go after it but he knows if worrying is your thing, he's going to pounce this Christmas. And if you don't worry about much, you go with the flow, but like porn is your struggle or drinking too much is your struggle, like he's going to go after it and you better be ready to fight because Christmas is a time for war.

Back in 1879, there was a Civil War general named William Tecumseh Sherman. The Civil War had ended about 15 years earlier but now General Sherman was giving a speech at the Michigan Military Academy and here are all these young men who are just itching to prove their courage and valor in the fight. They had been too young to remember what the Civil War was actually like and they'd been sitting in a classroom for far too long and now they're ready to put their skills into action. And do you know what General Sherman said to them? "Don't." He said, boys, I've been there. And he said - what now have become his most famous three words - he said, "Boys, war is hell." And he's right. If you have been in the middle of temptation, forgive my language, but it is hard as hell to actually love people. To love a single neighbor as much as you love yourself is hard as hell. To trust God when you don't have money and your health isn't great is hard as hell because temptation is a fight, a battle, and a war.

And that's why I love the word. Because when you are in the midst of that fight and you think about the Christmas story, guess what? There's not just a meek and mild, tender baby in a manger who's not going to get anywhere near the battle and the blood. Instead, you have a Jesus who came to fight. You have General Jesus, born in the manger, and all his angelic army are marching out because they're ready to fight for you. That Jesus, who is the Son of God, took on flesh and blood so that he could bleed for you. That if he stayed far, far away from our world, he could not go to war for you and so on Christmas, what did he choose? He entered the combat. He came into enemy territory so that he could fight so that you could be free. And this is the joy of Christmas; not just some warm, tender feeling but it's the feeling that God's children in Israel had when they were enslaved to a cruel master but then God showed up to fight for them. When he did the impossible to set them free. This is not just some tender, emotional time; this is a time when our chains are let go. We are forgiven and General Jesus comes to save.

Which is actually the message that is all over the Bible. Now you might think I'm squeezing a whole lot of imagery out of one word in the Christmas story but did you know that the Christmas prophecies about Jesus and then the life of Jesus and then the predictions about the return of Jesus all use this language? That Jesus came to fight for you? Let me prove it. There's a famous prophecy from Isaiah 9; you might recognize these words - some of you just sang them, right? "To us a child is born, to us a Son is given, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Awe, a beautiful child was born and he's the Prince of Peace but do you know the verses that came right before that? Let me show you: "For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire." Put that on your Christmas card, grandma! I mean, that is a sweet verse, isn't it? Oh, the beautiful night sky and there's the baby - like put the whole passage on there because this is a warrior who came to fight for you. For every temptation that feels like it's oppressing you, that you can't escape, no, a child was born for you. So at the end of the day, no matter how bad the struggle has been, you can find peace. That there is a mighty God and he used his mighty power to take every garment covered in blood, all the spatters of the battle that you lost, and he could finally give you peace by dying on the cross for your sin.

It's the same imagery that we find in the gospel of John. John 19 says when they came to Jesus on the cross and found him dead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a

sudden flow of blood and water. You ever think about that story? He's surrounded by armed men, he's hanging on a cross which is an instrument of war because he's fighting for us. This is Jesus jumping on the grenade so that he can take the explosion of sin and shame and regret and the anger of God and we can be left in peace. This is Jesus who is the wounded warrior who takes the bullet and he carries us out of battle so that we can be saved. And when Jesus comes back, guess how he's going to come? Not as a delicate little baby that you'll hold in your arms. I love this picture. If you think it's wrong for a Christian to have a tattoo, check out this passage. Revelation 19, John says, "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True." That's Jesus. "With justice, he judges and he rages war. He's dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the word of God. The armies of heaven were following him; riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Isn't that so good? That's Jesus! Our Jesus, who is a mighty warrior, apparently has a sweet thigh tattoo and he is coming dipped in blood with a sword in his mouth and any time the thoughts of your own heart would say that you were not worthy and you're not good enough and God must be ashamed of you, he strikes it down and runs it through and says, "No, no, no. This is one of my people that I've forgiven." And when the devil opens his lying mouth and he tries to convince you that God can't forgive you because you said you wouldn't do it again, Jesus strikes him down and he covers his accusation with his holy blood. He fought for you to set you free.

And now you know why those soldiers sang; because they love the plan of God that would leave you with so much peace and so much joy. And so when the angelic hosts, the armies of heaven, marched out on the night that Jesus was born, this is what they sang. "A great company of the heavenly army appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, peace to those whom his favor rests.'"

Do you know when peace is really, really good news? When you've been through a war. Proclaim peace to the nice people who live in the suburbs and just worry about end of the year taxes, doesn't mean much. But people who have been in the battle and are worried that they might not survive another day, proclaim peace and they will love it. So this Christmas, I want you to remember that: There is a war in our hearts. But even though we still fight scrimmages, the battle's been won because Jesus came to fight.

It makes me think of a conversation I had last week. A guy I met for coffee the first time who served our country and saw battle multiple times to defend our freedom. And as we talked about life and why someone would give up so much to fight for our country, for his family, for his friends, for our nation and our peace, I asked him a question about church. I said, in your own words, can you tell me what Christianity is really about? And he told me about half of it. He said, you know, I think Christianity is about being loving and respectful and selfless and kind and being an honest person, having great integrity. And I wanted to tell him there was something more. Christianity is not just about being good and fighting harder to have good integrity. It's about a God who saw you when you were weak and about to be defeated who came to fight for you. I asked him a crazy question. I said, "Do you think you'd ever take a bullet for a terrorist?" He looked at me funny. I said, "Because Jesus did." Even when we were sinners, the Bible says, Christ died for us. It wasn't his friends he was jumping on the grenade to

defend; it was those of us who were too weak to resist temptation. His love for us was so great he came into the world to save his enemies, to save you.

And that's why God's favor rests upon us. That's why we sing these songs. That's why we rejoice at Christmas. Not because of some nostalgic feeling with nice carols with family friends and candlelight church. It's because we have a God who came into this world to wage war so that we could be free. And so, I pray this Christmas that you sing glory to God in the highest heaven and I pray it comes out of a deep relief in your soul because you know the day is coming very, very soon when Jesus will return and he will be wonderful and he will be a mighty God and he will be your Prince of Peace and your soul will magnify the Lord because he fought for you. He won for you so that you could be set free.

And if you ever forget that, just talk to the buffest pastor on our church staff. It's not me. You ever met Pastor Tim from our church family before? He looks like a black ops angel, doesn't he? You ever see the tattoo Pastor Tim has on his arm? I'll show you a picture. It's of one of his favorite Bible passages, Zephaniah 3:17. I have to admit, even after all my theological education, I had no clue what Zephaniah 3 says. Some of you didn't even know there was a Zephaniah in the Bible. Well, there is and it's an incredible passage that makes me feel something incredible about Jesus. Here's what the passage says: "God will take great delight in you. In his love, he will no longer rebuke you but rejoice over you with singing." I love that! I mean, when I bottom out, when I mess things up, when I know I should have been better as a Christian, I think about these words. Because of Jesus, God likes me. He's not mad at me, he's not disappointed in you. In fact, he doesn't just delight in you. It says he will take great delight in you. He's not showing up to rebuke you, to correct you, to call you out. He shows up to sing over you like a kid who's falling in love for the first time. That's God's great affection for his people.

But I never realized something until last week; that that's not the entire passage. You see, when I found that little word "host" in the Bible, I did a word search of all the examples of battle and blood and soldiers and spears and armies and war and guess what passage came up in my search? Zephaniah 3:17. And I read how the passage begins: "The Lord your God is with you. The mighty warrior who saves."

Why does God delight in you? Why does he rejoice over all of his people no matter how bad they struggle with temptation? Because Immanuel showed up, God with us, and he is the mighty warrior who saves. So brothers and sisters, take a deep breath, rejoice this Christmas because the greatest war has already been won because Jesus, the warrior, was born in Bethlehem. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you so much that you chose to come into enemy territory to fight for us. You could have stayed comfortable in heaven but you didn't. You went through hell so that the struggles that we feel in this life are the closest to hell that any Christian will ever get. Thank you, Jesus, for those words that you have fought for us so we can just be still. We don't have to earn your love, we don't have to work hard to make you accept us. Through faith, everything is ours. And I pray as this day ends that we could realize and rejoice that you already rejoice over us. That you're not waiting until we improve ourselves. You're not holding your breath for a better

version of us until you accept us and save us. Instead, you give that to us as the greatest Christmas gift. And so I pray for an open-eyed awareness, Lord, that we would realize that you are a God who has been so good. I pray no matter how big or how frequent our gifts that we can be content in the days to come because you are with us and because you have given us the greatest gift; the gift of salvation.

Help us to fight the good fight, today, God. Help us to fight out of gratitude and not out of fear. Help us to fight at each other's side and have each other's backs when those temptations come. And more than anything, help us to remind one another that you are a mighty warrior who saves. Jesus, we pray this all in your powerful name, Amen.