



## TIME OF GRACE®

### *Christmas Buzzwords: Peace*

#### Study Notes

#### *Summary*

How do you define the word *peace*? Is it merely the time when nations and people are not at war, when fighting and conflicts cease? The Bible's answer is . . . kind of. The peace that the angels sang about the night of Jesus' birth is something much more, something we all deeply long for, something that only Christ can provide.

- Peace has a \_\_\_\_\_.
- **James 4:1,2:** <sup>1</sup>What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup>You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.
- **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 53:2,5:** <sup>2</sup>He grew up before him like a tender shoot. . . . <sup>5</sup>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.
- **Luke 2:13,14:** <sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."
- Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ for your peace.
- **Numbers 6:24-26:** <sup>24</sup>The LORD bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup>the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup>the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

#### *Points to Ponder*

1. Is something getting in the way of you doing life together with your family members or friends? Read James 4:1-12 and consider God's desire for you to live in unity and peace.

2. Meditate on the classic words of the blessing from Numbers 6:24-26. How is God's smiling face related to the peace we have in our hearts?

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read 1 John 4:7-11.

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Christmas Buzzwords: Peace**  
James 4:1,2; Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 53:2,5; Luke 2:13,14  
December 19, 2021

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

I am not sure if I wanted to mess with my holiday spirit the other day, but I decided to look up all of the conflict, and all of the strife, and all of the wars that are happening in our world right now. And if you are having a good day, I would not recommend doing the same thing. I ended up on a Wikipedia page called, "Ongoing Armed Conflicts," that just listed, country by country, all of the places on planet earth where war is happening right now and all of the lives that have been lost in that conflict. And I read about the, what, 400,000 deaths and counting in the Syrian civil war, and I studied the 200,000 deaths and counting in the Mexican drug war. I read about the crazy strife happening right now in Yemen, the kids that were just abducted in Nigeria. Country after country, place after place, some I had heard of, some I had never heard of, and it proved to me that our planet is not a very peaceful place.

Some of you know that, not just from the news, but from your own experience. You are old enough to remember Vietnam, or the Persian Gulf, or Iraq, or Afghanistan, and you know personally better than any of us that the world is not always full of peace, and happiness, and love, and joy.

Think personally for a second. Is there any relationship in your life right now that is not exactly filled with happiness and peace? Could you think of someone in your family? Maybe it is your older brother or your younger sister, or maybe it is your significant other, or your spouse, or one of your children, where it is not exactly a happy home, full of unity and a lot of this. Can you think of a co-worker that you kind of butt heads with? Or a next-door neighbor that you have never really, really actually liked? Can you think of someone at church where it gets kind of awkward, and you try to be cordial about it, but you do not exactly get along? Can you think of an ex, or someone you used to date or be married to, where the relationship is tense and it is just the facts because it gets emotional really, really quickly?

I think all of us could probably think of someone, and my question to you is, why is that? If you prefer to live with less drama, and I prefer to live with less drama, and they would prefer the exact same thing, why is it that peace between people is so difficult? Why are relationships with peace, and extended families with peace, and neighborhoods with peace - why does that seem like such a rare thing?

Well, I have a theory that I want to test out on you today. And if you are taking notes at home or in your program, here is the theory I want to test out on you. I think that peace is so rare because

of this - because peace has a price. What do you think? Am I right about that? Let me give a bunch of examples to see if I can prove my point.

Two preschoolers both want the same plastic fire truck. And when they both think about me, what I want, there is not going to be a lot of peace. Two sisters both want to wear the same pair of shoes to high school. Two significant others both want the other person to apologize first. Two older siblings have different ways of caring for their aging mother in a nursing home. Two gangs both want the same block. Two nations both want the same land. It does not matter where you are or what you are doing. It could be two brothers both wanting the controller for the next game of, "Assassin's Creed," or two kings both wanting the same plot of land to get to the oil and resources.

When any two people or groups think, "me" and "I," you miss out on peace. And so, peace becomes an incredibly rare thing because the hardest thing in the world is to tame the warlord within you. All right? That beating heart that says, "Me first, me first, me first, me first." This is why dating someone is hard. This is why being a good neighbor is really hard. You want the grass to look like that, and they would prefer to make it look like that. You know, the smallest thing, the biggest thing, nations, countries, or spouses, "me first" makes a mess and that is why we so rarely have peace.

You get your first job and you think you know how the job should be done, and when it should be done, and how fast it should be done - then your boss has a different opinion. You are growing up as a teenager and your parents tell you, "Here are the chores and here is when I want them done," and you prefer to do them at a different time and in a different way. There are a thousand different examples. You get my point.

Peace has a crazy high price. Actually though, this is not my personal theory. This is a theory that I stole from Jesus' little brother, James. Check out his powerful words. James 1 says, "What causes fights and quarrels among you?" Why isn't there more peace? "Do not they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but you do not have, so you kill, you covet, but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight."

So, Merry Christmas, everyone! They are thinking, "Thanks, Pastor! Great holiday season!" No, I wanted to be real with you today because all of us ache for peace, and we sing Christmas hymns and carols about peace, but it is a really honest question to say, is that even possible? If everyone in your family and in your neighborhood has that same "me first" heart and that still beats within you, even if you are a follower of Jesus, could this ever change?

And the difficult but amazing answer I have for you today is yes, it can. With people, things might feel impossible, but with God all things are possible, and today, I want to show you how. Today, I want to show you how Jesus Christ himself made peace with a bunch of people who were thinking of themselves first. How Jesus changed the way that Christian people think about God, not struggling, and striving, and shaking a fist, but obeying, and following, and submitting, and saying to God, "You first." Like, how did he do that?

If you are a follower of Jesus right now, if you are a Christian who says, "I obey God, and I listen to God, and I read the book and do my best to submit to God," how in the world did that happen if you were born with a "me first" heart? Well, today, I am going to show you. I was able to search through this book, the Bible, and cover to cover found that there are 249 different spots that bring up the word, "peace." And I don't have time to talk about all of them today, but I want to touch down in just a few places to show you how Jesus made peace with his people, and maybe in the process we can learn about how to make peace with each other.

So, we are going to begin our journey in a great classic prophecy from the Old Testament, Isaiah 9, and here is what the prophet Isaiah wrote, about 700 B.C. "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." There will be something about Jesus, something powerful within him that would bring peace and unity to people who were previously separated from God.

And that is why I brought this. Anyone know what this is? I was looking for a present for my youngest daughter's birthday and I ended up in the comic book shop across the street, and for \$5, I picked up this source of happiness - Baby Yoda. The band told me today if the sermon is going bad, all I have to do is prop up Baby Yoda and leave the stage, and all of you will think this is a great church service. Have you met Baby Yoda just yet? It is like, captured the hearts of as many people as Jesus Christ himself.

Baby Yoda is actually the unofficial name of the star of the Disney+ show, "The Mandalorian." Did you know that "Baby Yoda" is not his actual name? His official name, it is actually printed on the bottom here, is "The Child." And I will not ruin the show for you, but when we meet Baby Yoda, or The Child, in the first episode, there is something powerful and mysterious about him. Like, everyone wants to get close to him because there is something within him, something actually in his blood, that has power that no one else has. And there is this belief in the show that if we could just get to The Child, if we could just get in contact and tap into the power of the blood of that child, things would be different - the world would change and the war would end.

And when I heard that plot line, I said, "You plagiarized Jesus!" Like, I have heard of this before! I mean, 700 years before he was born, a child who will be born whose blood could end the war and the conflict? A child whose heart has something, some mysterious power that no one else has, that was the prophecy of Isaiah, that Jesus would come as the Mighty God and the Prince of Peace, and here is how he would bring it.

Jump ahead a few chapters in Isaiah and we stumble across these words. "He," the child, "grew up before God like a tender shoot. 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." The Prince of Peace would come, but how would peace come? Through punishment, not from the Mighty God coming down from heaven and punishing all of the people who had struggled with this "me first" heart - no, no, no. This child did what no one would have expected. He brought peace by saying the only words in the whole world that could end the war, "You first."

And sometimes I think we sentimentalize Christmas a bit too much. You know, we sing like, "Away in a Manger," and it is so soothing, right? This lovely little lullaby, and we think about Jesus, eight pounds, six ounces, laying on the hay. He does not cry. We look at that little baby in Mary's arms, the little fingers and toes, in flesh and blood Emmanuel, God with us, but do you know what lots of people forget? That the only reason Jesus came with flesh and blood was so that he could later bleed. So he could pay the price that could give you peace with God. When you see Jesus in the manger, a shudder should come up your spine as peace starts to creep into your "me first" heart to think, "God did what?"

You know, that thought hit me a couple of months ago. Back in 1968, a construction crew was digging in an eastern suburb of Jerusalem. And as so often happens in Israel, as they were digging, they stumbled across a 2,000-year-old tomb. And inside the tomb, they found a treasure - an archaeological discovery like had never been found before and has never been seen since, a discovery that they took and put in a special glass case that is housed in the biggest museum in all of Israel.

And not too long ago, I saw it, and I snapped a picture so you could see it, too. What they found was this. That is a 2,000-year-old nail, smashed through the bone of a human being, and it is the only surviving archaeological evidence of a first century crucifixion. That is the heel bone of a crucifixion victim, a man named Yehohanan. Picture that, the bone right here and a steel smashed through it.

And when you stand in front of that, when your face is not a social distance from it and you think, "God did that? God?" and you cannot sing, "Away in a Manger" the same. You cannot think about Christmas the same. What kind of person would go through that? I mean, when I hit - when I hit my hand with the hammer, much less the nail, what kind of God would choose that?

But Jesus, in the craziest love in the world, he was so dedicated to you having peace with God that that is what he chose. The Son was born, and the child was given, and the power that could bring peace came through his suffering and through his death. Jesus Christ is God himself. He was the prince with the throne and the crown, but he laid it all down. He laid himself down. He himself was lifted up so that you and I could be lifted up and have peace with God.

Jesus Christ, in the craziest act in all of religious history, came down from heaven, looked his creation in the eye, and said, "You first. I do not want to fight anymore. I do not want to go to war with your heart that does not trust me just yet, so I will prove it to you. You first." And he said to all of us who struggle to trust God, all of us who are not so sure about his commandments and the things he says about time and money or sexuality, he says, "Let me prove to you that I only want what is best for you. You first."

And he gave up everything and gave his flesh and blood on the cross so that you and I could be first - the first to know that we are loved by God right now. The first to know that we have access to talk to God whenever we want. The first to believe that God has plans for us, not to harm us,

but to give us hope and a future. The first to look into the mirror and know that I am clean, and I am holy, and I am enough for God because Jesus paid the price for my peace.

That is what Jesus did. In crazy, indescribable love, that is what he did for you, that is what he did for us. And so, no wonder, on that first Christmas night, when Mary gave that final push, an army of angels appeared. They did not come to make war with us. Instead, they came to proclaim peace.

Do you remember what they said in Luke 2? "Glory to God in the highest heaven," they sang, "and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." A host of angels - do you know what the word "host" means? Army. God sent an army of angels, but they did not get out their swords. Instead, they lifted up their shouts and they said there is peace for all those on whom his favor rests.

So, if you are taking notes, let us write down the secret recipe to peace. The secret is that Jesus paid the price for your peace. Now, what does all of this mean for you? A lot is my answer. But the clock is ticking and we do not have forever on our TV program, so let me cut to the chase. This means that you can have peace with God right now and you can take the first piece, the first step to having peace with him as soon as possible.

Right now, there is peace. Some of you get that. Some of you are the engineering and mathematical types. You read the passage, that is what you believe. But some of you, you know who you are, you have the big heart, the compassion, the emotion. It is so often overwhelming for you. I want you to know that right now, whatever you feel about it, you have peace with God, that Jesus' favor rests on you. You do not have to wonder about it, you do not have to work for it, you do not have to get better, you do not have to get sober. Right now, through faith in Jesus Christ, there is peace. And you can strive, and you can work, and you can try to be better tomorrow, not to earn peace, but believing that you already have it.

The fruit of the Spirit is peace, and it comes right from God. So, brothers and sisters, I want to tell you right now, stop striving, stop working, start resting. It is yours. And when that gets deep, deep into your heart, I want you to know that is how we can treat each other, too.

That is actually why we made the t-shirts. Have any of you seen these yet? When we opened this new campus, we wanted two words to define the way we treated each other. We wanted every volunteer, from those at the front doors, to the ushers giving bulletins, to those making coffee, to have two words stamped right on their chest to define how we treat each other in this church - "You first."

By God's crazy timing! I had a conversation with a guy who is in church right now, and I was talking to him about Christmas Eve worship. And he said, "Pastor, I am not sure if we are going to come." And I said, "Oh, what is up with that?" And he said, "I would just feel terrible if like, a guest came, and my family was sitting, and like, they did not have a place to sit." "You first."

See, when you and I think about the person who walks through the door for the first time, when it is not about our favorite seats or our little circle of friends that we can laugh and share jokes with, when our eyes are open for someone who is taking another chance on church, for someone who has not been religious or spiritual in a long time, when we say, "How are you? How can I help you? Do you want to sit by me?" "You first" makes us so, so, so blessed.

And so, brothers and sisters, I want to challenge you. This is a big week for our church. Last Sunday, we had a guest, who invited a guest, who invited a guest, who invited a guest, and people are showing up here for the first time and discovering God and the gospel, and discovering peace with their Savior in heaven. And so, this week, when you come in a few days, I want you to know that more people are coming. We do not know how many and we cannot predict it, so we do not know if they are going to fit, but I just want to put these two words on your heart today - "You first."

If you have to give up your seat, if you have to go to the lobby, I guarantee you it is a better worship experience here than out there. So, if it is full and if there is no place to sit, I want you out there, or in your car, or driving back home, because, "You first," could connect them to the Prince of Peace. And that will prepare you for after Christmas is over, and you run into that person at the holiday party or after the New Year where things are a little bit tense, and God will start to train you to take the first step that creates peace.

As you think for one second, what would that look like? That co-worker where things are tense, the boss where you butted heads. What could you do or say in the next month that would make that relationship better? What Christmas card could you write and maybe own your part of the tension? What apology could you offer? What gift could you give? I do not know who that person is. I do not know what step you have to take. And I do not know if they will be humble enough to reciprocate to you, but I will tell you what. When you serve people and say, "You first," your conscience calms down and you get to sleep with peace.

So, as you think about the next step to take, let me leave you with my personal favorite example of the word "peace" in all of the Bible - 249 different uses, this one is my favorite. "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you," on you, "with his favor, and give you peace."

Let us pray.

Oh, Jesus, thank you so much. At Christmas, we do not just celebrate a birth, we celebrate the birth of a humble Savior who would pay the price so that none of us would have to wonder. We would not have to wonder if we are there yet, if we are good enough, if we have earned it. Instead, we could have access to you and stand in grace, and know that right now - not tomorrow, but right now - peace through you is ours.

I thank you for the gift of the gospel, and I will ask you, Holy Spirit, that you would produce in us what we simply cannot produce in ourselves - peace, and kindness, and selflessness, and love. God, it is so hard for us. It is so hard, when someone has not been good to us, to be good to them



in return. It is not natural, and so, we need something supernatural. We need the blood of Christ to inspire us to be different, to shock people, to love even our enemies, to not return insult with insult, but instead with a blessing because we have first been blessed.

So, God, the next time we see them, the next time their name pops up on our phone, help us. Help us to respond with grace, with love, and take a step that leads to the thing we all want, the gift of peace. We pray this all because we know how you feel about us. Your face is shining on us and you are looking at us with favor that allows us to pray today in peace. We love you, we thank you, God, and we ask for your help today. In Jesus' name, Amen.