

Peace on Earth #4
Oh Praise Him!
Luke 2:13-20 & Philippians 4:4-7
12/25/16

- Most of us have seen the classic Christmas movie “It’s a Wonderful Life. If you haven’t, the main character, George Bailey, played by Jimmy Stewart falls into some financial trouble and not knowing what to do, he suddenly wishes he had never been born. Clarence, his guardian angel decides to grant his wish. George then sees how his life actually matters.
 - o Now, it’s just a movie of course but it brings us to an important question.... What if you and I had never been born? What if the words we have spoken all these years were never heard and what if the actions we have taken to help others never really happened? Would our lives have made any difference at all?

- Over the last few weeks, we’ve been looking a lot at the story of the angel appearing to the shepherds. The shepherds may have wondered whether they were important enough to really make a difference in the world.
 - o An interesting survey was done.... Church members were asked which character in the Christmas story do you most identify with? Mary? Joseph? The shepherds? The wise men? More people gave the answer “shepherds” than any other character.
 - o Why? Probably because the shepherds were just normal people. Just normal guys, trying to eek out of a living. Mary and Joseph were probably really good and holy, I mean, after all, God picked them to raise his Son. The wise men where super smart. But, the shepherds are like one of us.

- Over the weeks leading to today, we’ve also been talking about peace. Many might think that peace is the absence of action. We have found that peace is anything but stagnant or a lack of activity. Instead, peace is all about action and being lived out in some way.
 - o So, we’ve seen how as receivers of God’s peace, we are to be peacemakers. We’ve seen how peace leads to true reconciliation and action in the face of oppression and injustice. We’ve seen how the peace Jesus gives is to bring peace between us and God and us and one another.
 - o This morning, we are going to see another action prompted by peace. It is the action of praise.

- So, since we have specifically been looking at the story of the shepherds, we are going finish looking at their story this morning. Let’s read **Luke 2:13-20**.
 - o If you remember, in verse 8, an angel appeared to the shepherds. The first response of the shepherds was to be afraid. Makes sense. An angel appears in the sky along with the radiance of the Lord’s glory which would mean that a big, bright light pierced the night sky. Who wouldn’t be afraid?

- The angel reassures them and tells them about the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem, the One who would bring peace.
- Then, check out what happened next. The realization of peace on earth brings exuberant joy that can only be expressed in praise to God. In fact, the joy is so great that one angel alone cannot adequately praise God, but the angel is joined by a multitude of heavenly host, who are praising God for peace on earth. Peace results in praise.
 - One angel began the proclamation of the Prince of Peace and it prompted such praise in the heavens that other angels had to join in! A host of angels which is an army of angels. That's a lot of angels!
 - They were praising God for sending peace on earth! Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased!
- There is nothing said about the shepherds being afraid now. That's because praise casts out fear! Peace casts out fear! No, an army of angels praising God for peace does not incite fear.
 - Instead, what was the response of the shepherds to this message of peace and heavenly praise – they took action. They left everything they had, all the sheep they were responsible for, the life that they knew and went to find the baby the angel told them about.
 - The praise of the angels prompts the shepherd to seek the Messiah, the source of God's peace, for themselves. Why would they leave their very livelihood behind? They wanted to experience peace! They wanted to experience the peace that caused an army of angels to fill the sky in praise. They wanted to experience the peace that would cause such a joyous proclamation of heavenly hosts.
- See, when we see God praised and joy overflowing in others, we want to experience it ourselves and it doesn't matter as much what we have to leave behind in order to experience that kind of peace, praise and joy.
 - Listen, I have said this before and I will say it over and over. No one is drawn to Jesus through negativity. No one gets scared into the Kingdom. No one gets guilted into a relationship with Jesus. Fire and brimstone preaching talking about the punishment of hell might get people to repent or say a salvation prayer to avoid hell, but their commitment won't last!
 - Likewise, seeing a bunch of people coming to church out of obligation and being a bunch of grumpy people because of it won't draw people to Jesus either.
 - Who is going to leave everything they know, the life that they know, the habits that they know, the culture they know to follow ba-humbug? No one!
- People are drawn to Jesus through our praise! People are drawn to Jesus through our joy! People are drawn to Jesus through our love! People are drawn to Jesus through our peace!
 - People are drawn to Jesus when they come into this place and this is a place of joyous praise, not begrudged obligation. People are drawn to church when they can sense the joy already flowing out the doors and into the streets!

- People are drawn to Jesus and to being a follower of his when they don't have to see the smile on our faces because they already sense the joy exuding out of us even by looking at the back of our heads!
 - People will leave everything to have that kind of joy! People will leave everything to have that kind of peace! People will leave everything to find something that worthy of their praise!
 - It doesn't take an army of angels to convince people. It takes us living out the peace of Jesus through our joy-filled praise of him. Just as peace results in praise to God, this praise draws others to seek peace for themselves.
- The shepherds found this out as well. Remember from a couple of weeks ago how shepherds were seen in society – as the lowest on the social ladder, as unclean, as undesirable.
- But, once they met Jesus for themselves, all that changed. Oh it didn't change society. Society still devalued them. They still had the same social status. They still had the same problems. They still had the same dead end job.
 - What changed was their hearts, their outlook, their vision. They changed from the inside. They experienced peace in person when they met Jesus and it changed everything. The shepherds could go back to their lowly jobs and lowly status but be at peace because they knew their status in the world wasn't their real status. They were followers of the Most High, the Messiah! They were of value in heaven. They were of value to the Prince of Peace.
 - The angels came to them. God saw them! God knew them! God came to be with them! God invited them to meet him!
- When you experience the peace of Jesus for yourself, it changes everything because it changes your heart, your outlook, your vision and your purpose. When your heart changes and your vision changes and your purpose changes – your whole life changes.
- Then, like the shepherds, you can face anything. You can face a dead end job. You can face terrible circumstances. You can face hard times. You can face when others look down on you. You can face anything and still have peace.
 - Because you know the source of Peace. You know that God sees you! You know God knows you! You know God is with you! You have his peace – a peace that surpasses understanding.
- There are some verses in Philippians that talk about this peace. These are verses that I would encourage everyone to memorize enough in order to be able to recall it when you are facing undesirable things that will come up in life. It's **Philippians 4:4-7**. Let's read them together.
- Do you see the cyclical nature of peace and praise? Experiencing peace through Jesus leads to praise. Our praise of God, then leads to further peace. The more peace you experience, the more your praise and the more you praise, the more peace you experience.

- So, things aren't going well? Tell God about it and ask him for help and then praise him! Then you will experience his peace – a peace that is beyond anything you can conjure up on your own. It is a peace from the Mighty God.
 - So, situations stink? Your health is going downhill. Your finances are rocky. Your relationships are unstable. Your family is in crisis. Call out to God and thank him for answering, praise him for answering, and experience his peace in every situation. Things might not miraculously or instantaneously be fixed, but his peace is near and when you have tapped into his peace you can better see where he wants you to go, what step he wants you to take next and what he wants you to do.
- And, like the shepherds, when you experience the peace of Jesus, you can't help but praise him!! When we have that kind of peace and praise, people begin to notice. As the shepherds returned to their fields, they are so filled with joy that they felt compelled to praise God and part of that praise was to tell everyone what had just happened to them and what the angel said about the child. The Messiah had come! Peace had come – to everyone!
- And so, they invited everyone – everyone is a lot of people – they invited everyone to know peace as well. They invited everyone because they knew the Messiah came for everyone. Their praise pointed people to peace through the Prince of Peace.
 - And, all who heard them were astonished. They were astonished at the change in these shepherds. They were astonished that these shepherds were so full of peace and praise. They were astonished that peace was available everyone. They were astonished enough maybe to even seek peace, to seek Jesus themselves.
- When we praise God, when we are a people of peace, others seek to experience that peace as well. They are drawn to it.
- I know there are people in this room who others are drawn to in times of crisis. When something happens in life, people aren't seeking the counsel of just anyone. They go to those who have peace, who have a grounding that is bigger than themselves, who have a deep joy that isn't dependent on circumstances. People in crisis are more likely to come to church. Why? Because they need peace! They need joy! They are yearning for something more.
 - Church, as we engage in being peacemakers, joy will abound, praise will abound and people will be drawn to the church to experience this peace for themselves. Our purpose must be a lived out reality that will draw people to Jesus.
 - The greatest way we can draw people is by living out that reality. We can't do by talking about our purpose. We have to live it. We have to have the Peace that has changed us. We have to be people of praise for that peace.
- And, we can further praise because we will find that the Prince of Peace is trustworthy. The last verse says the shepherds went back to their flocks and were glorifying and praising God. Did you get that? They left their sheep, trusting in the message of the angels. They returned and found that God was trustworthy in keeping their flocks safe. God not only

gave them a new status, a new heart, a new reason for living and a new purpose, but he even kept their flocks safe so they could find him.

- People are so worried about what they might have to leave behind to follow Jesus. Yet, the shepherds' story tells us today that following Jesus is following one whose peace and praise is trustworthy. The Source of Peace and praise given to Him are trustworthy. This causes us to trust him more and praise him more and find more peace in him.
 - He is not going to ask you leave something behind without giving you more than you had before!
 - He is trustworthy to take better care of your life, your family, your job...everything... better than you can. As you follow him, he will give you a new status, a new reason for living, a new purpose, a new peace, a new reason for being thankful and he will show you that he will provide fully for you! He will show you, even in the little things, even when you have to leave some things behind or let some things go, that he is worthy to be praised!
- O praise him!! Peace has come! O praise him! Praise him for the peace that surpasses understanding! O praise him for peace that guards your hearts and minds! O praise him for the joy that can fill our hearts no matter what might be happening around us!
- As you experience more and more of the peace of Christ, your natural response is to praise him more and more, to rejoice in all things, more and more. And, as you do that, know that an army of angels is joining with you!
- And, know this – just like George Bailey found out, your life does matter. Even more, it does matter whether you praise or not. Your praise draws people to meet the Savior. Your peace brings praise which brings more peace and peace making draws people to meet the Savior.
- You are here this morning because angels filled the sky in praise. We are here this morning because shepherds went and saw and told everyone. We are here because peace came to earth. Who will be here in the next generations because of our praise? Who will be here in the next generations because of the peace that came into our lives through Jesus? Who will be here because we told them about Jesus?
 - Let our peace turn into praise and our praise turn into greater peace so that all the world may know the Messiah has come! O come let us adore Him!