

Perfect Peace was Born in Bethlehem

Grace, mercy and peace are yours, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Where can we find peace? In today's age of technology, to answer this question I went to the place that has all the answers. The internet. The world is full of snappy sayings from people describing what peace is, and where to find it. "You'll never find peace of mind until you listen to your heart." George Michael. Ralph Waldo Emerson says that "nobody can bring you peace but yourself." Actor Denzel Washington says that, "For me, success is inner peace." These little sayings sound great, but do they really tell us where true peace is found?

Peace was on God's mind the first Christmas Day. However, the peace that he sent was not in the cattle mooing in the stable. It wasn't found in the peaceful twinkling stars. God's peace for the world was announced by the angels. "**Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.**" That peace was the little baby Jesus.

In our Scripture lesson for this evening, the prophet Micah has peace on his mind as well. He looked ahead some 700 years to the peace that God would send. He shows us that peace is not something we can search for or discover on our own. True peace is only found in Christ our Savior, and because it is, we live securely.

I. WE CAN'T FIND PEACE IN WORLDLY THINGS

In Micah's day, the Israelites certainly were not living securely. Micah's message throughout his book is one of condemnation, and the impending doom of the nation of Judah. The Israelites had not pleased God. They looked for peace in the sinful practices of the nations surrounding them: idolatry, prostitution, even child sacrifice. The Israelites believed in God, or at least they said they did and worshipped him on the outside. But in their hearts, they craved the sinful desires of the world. They thought they could serve two masters, God and sin, and still have peace.

The peace that they found in these sinful things did not last long. If you quickly page through the books of Kings and Chronicles, you might notice that there is a lot of death, destruction, betrayal and overall evil that went on in the land of Israel. Many times, a king is described as "doing evil in the sight of the LORD." All that death and destruction was the result of the Israelites engaging in sinful practices, hoping to find peace. However, these things gave them the opposite of peace! War, death, constant conflict, and finally slavery at the hands of the Babylonians. All of that came because they did not pursue peace from God and his Word, but instead from worldly, sinful things.

Where do you look to find peace? When the papers that are due continue to stack up, when final exams pile on the stress, when the house just can't stay clean for a couple of hours, when there's always more decorating and cooking to do, the bills continue to pile up, work gets more and more stressful, what do you look to for peace? The temptation is to look to sinful thing just like the Israelites did. Maybe you turn to alcohol. It's better to feel nothing at all, then to deal with the stress of the world. But that buzz doesn't last. Or do you find your peace in your Xbox or Playstation? Hours upon hours of mindless gaming might sound a whole lot better than dealing with your family. For some of you, work might be your "retreat." It's where you can go to take a break from all the issues at home, or the troubles that you face out in the world.

Wherever this worldly peace is found, there's one thing that it always has in common. It never lasts. Things of this world provide temporary peace at best. You can go to your "quiet place" for a couple of hours or even days, but that peace never lasts forever. And what's worse, any sinful thing...addiction, neglect, abandonment...these only result in more problems. But the biggest problem of all is that this sin incurs the wrath of God. We deserve his punishment because we looked to sin, and not to God, to give us peace.

So many people focus on finding peace in worldly, sinful things, only to be let down over and over again. They're looking in the wrong place, or to the wrong things. Thankfully God didn't leave us searching for peace. He's already given us it to us! Through the prophet Micah, God points us to where our perfect peace was born. He points us to the most unlikely place, the tiny town of Bethlehem.

II. JESUS IS PEACE

Micah says, **But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.** A king was going to be born in the tiny town of Bethlehem. This town was so small in comparison to the others around it, like Jerusalem, that it didn't really matter to most. But God made this insignificant town into the most important place in all of history!

This baby king who was born in Bethlehem was more than just an ordinary baby. His **origins are from old, from ancient times.** All the way back, at the beginning of history, God made a promise to the first humans, to Adam and Eve. After they fell into sin and destroyed their perfect peace with God, instead of destroying them, God made them a promise. Speaking to the devil, he said, **“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”** God promised Adam and Eve that he would send a Savior, one who would crush the devil's head and restore true peace.

God never went back on that promise. He never forgot about it. He continued to keep it throughout all of the Old Testament. After Abraham showed his faith in the promise of God, the Lord told him **through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.** Joseph, one of Abraham's great-grandsons, was sold into slavery, but God used the pain and hardship in his life to save the rest of his family from a famine that plagued the land. Fast forward four hundred years. The descendants of Joseph were now slaves of Egypt, but God raised up Moses, and used him to deliver his people from the clutches of Pharaoh. As time went on, the Israelites continued to grumble and complain and even turn to other gods, but God continued to hold firm to his promise of a Savior from Abraham's descendants. God gave King David the same promise that he had given to Abraham almost a thousand years before. In 2 Samuel chapter 7, God promises David that **your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.** This ruler that God promised to David is the very same one that Micah prophesied about. Our Savior Jesus was born in Bethlehem, an insignificant town only a few miles from the most significant place in history: the hill where Jesus died on the cross and won perfect peace for us!

We have this peace through Christ, a peace that means so much more than any peace of mind here on earth. Jesus is our Savior. He fulfilled the promise that God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He died on the cross in our place to forgive our sins. We were at war with God, separated from him by our sinfulness, but Christ has brought us close to God again.

Jesus IS our peace. Believing in him as our Savior gives us peace to the fullest. It assures us that all of our sins, no matter how bad we think they may be, have been paid for and forgiven. God no longer remembers our wrongs because of what Christ did for us. Sin, death and the devil have no power over us. We are free from fear of them, because Christ conquered them all for us.

We have ongoing peace through the King born in the City of David. He rules over all things from heaven on high as our King. When things do go bad, and “life happens,” we have peace knowing that Christ our King is using those things for our benefit. It may not seem to us like it's a good thing, but Jesus always keeps his promises, just like the promise that was given to Adam and Eve.

To help reinforce this truth to us, Micah uses a second picture for Jesus. A shepherd. What does a shepherd do? He provides for his sheep. He leads them to where there is good food and water. He protects his flock at night when they are most vulnerable. Christ does all that, and more for us as our Good Shepherd. Micah tells us that Jesus **will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.** Jesus is no ordinary shepherd! He is God, powerful, almighty and all-knowing. He leads and cares for his sheep in a way that no one else is capable of. His voice! We hear the voice of our Good Shepherd through the Word, always reminding us that he will never leave us or forsake us.

III. WE LIVE SECURELY IN CHRIST

And now as Micah says in verse 4, because we have this peace, we **will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.** The world can't give peace that lasts forever. Sin will never give us peace. Only through faith in the Shepherd-King, Jesus, are we given a peace that always keeps us safe and

living securely. No matter how bad things get, we know that Jesus is always ruling over and providing and caring for his flock.

2019 could be the worst year ever for you and me. Our country could go to war. We could lose jobs, money, friendships. Health may decline, fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados... there's so much that could go wrong. But no matter how bad of a year it might be, there is one comfort that will remain constant for every one of you. Jesus is your peace. As bad as life on earth may be, it is nothing when compared to the eternal bliss that awaits us in heaven. That is what brings us peace!

So this Christmas Eve, rejoice along with the angels, who declared to the shepherds, "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.**" This isn't just a pious wish. It's the truth! We have every reason to rejoice, for the little baby born in such an insignificant town changed everything for us. Peace is no longer a question mark. It's not something that we have to search for in every nook and cranny. Jesus offers peace to you through his sacrifice on the cross. Live in this confidence, safe and secure in your Savior Jesus, for he is your peace. Amen.