



FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT ADVENT SPEAKS OF PEACE

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The truths of Advent are profound and its implications far-reaching. Thus, before coming to the final theme of peace, a number of observations are in order.

The first observation concerns God and his glory. We might be forgiven for thinking, going by a superficial reading of Advent, that the celebration is all about us—our hope, the love that God has for us, the joy of our sins forgiven, and the peace we receive through the gospel. A closer look, however, reveals that the celebration is first and foremost about God. His glory shines through both his eternal plan to save the world (Jn. 1:29) and his triune love in executing it. Listen to Mary, **“My soul magnifies the Lord”** (Lk. 1:46); to Zechariah, **“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel”** (Lk. 1:68); to the multitude of the heavenly host, **“Glory to God in the highest”** (Lk. 2:14); and to Simeon, **“my eyes have seen your salvation”** (Lk. 2:30). Then there are the *Magi*, who, upon seeing Jesus, **“fell down and worshiped him”** (Matt. 2:11).

The second observation concerns Christ and his benefits. Similarly, we must avoid the danger of so focusing on hope, love, joy, and peace as to abstract such blessings from Christ. Without him they would become meaningless and impossible (in so far as the Bible defines them). Christ, then, is our primary focus, compared to whom the blessings are secondary. This prioritization counters today’s cravings for instant gratification and rebuffs the de-Christianizing of Christmas. When we rush past Christ to get to “What’s in it for me,” we dull the celebration of Advent and Christmas. We keep together, then, and in the right order, Christ and his benefits.

The third observation concerns us and our perspectives. At the outset of Advent, we noted that its focus in history has gone back and forth between Christ’s first and second advents. After all, we live between them. We, thus, prepare our hearts for celebrating the first Advent and our lives for the second. Paul makes this very point in Titus 2:11-15. He tells Titus on the one hand that **“the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,”** and, on the other, that we are to renounce all ungodliness and worldly passions as we await **“our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”**. We thus we look back with thankfulness and forward in hope.

The fourth observation concerns man and his cynicism. By nature, man lives by sight, dismissing what is supernatural in the history of redemption, and claiming for support of this the apparent failure of Christ’s first advent. The fact that God’s purposes in Christ are yet to be consummated or fulfilled means nothing to him. Even so, he forgets:

- The state of the world when Christ came. How dark it was without Christ and the spread of the gospel to the nations. Those were the days of what the Bible calls “ignorance” (Acts 3:17; 17:30; Rom. 3:25). Yet, such is the difference that Christ has made that we now describe history in terms of B.C. (Before Christ) or *Anno Domini* (In the year of our Lord). Since history is his-story, we are not surprised that man seeks to replace B.C. with the banal B.C.E. (Before Common era) and C.E. (Common Era)!
- The gospel of Christ. Man looks for hope but clings to his sin. He yearns to feel God’s love but thinks nothing of grieving his Spirit. He questions whether there is joy in Christ but resists the repentance which leads to it. And he longs for peace and acceptance with God but stands aloof from his overtures of grace. Inevitably, then, man fails to sense the difference that Christ made, for without faith and repentance he is yet to encounter him.

This brings us to the theme of peace, for it is the proclamation of the heavenly host that Christ came to bring peace of earth which troubles the cynic the most (Lk. 2:14). We, thus, end our Advent series clarifying what the Bible has in view when speaking of peace. (Image: <https://medium.com/the-masters-university/peace-on-earth-goodwill-to-men-fc6f8f8df54>, accessed November 23, 2020).



Peace with God.

When man thinks of peace, he invariably thinks of world peace. There will be no cessation of hostilities between nations, however, without peace with God. This is fundamental to the Bible's reference to peace on earth, for in Scripture reconciliation with God precedes peace among men.

Reconciliation occurs through Christ. Paul states this in 2 Cor. 5:18, then says it again: ***"in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself"*** (2 Cor. 5:19). Notice, that it is we who need to be reconciled to God. After all, we are the ones who, by nature, hate God, sin against him, and refuse his fellowship. Whether we hide the fact behind our personalities or our religions, we are, from conception, God's implacable enemies. Yet, God, the offended party, has, amazingly, taken the initiative to reconcile us to himself. How marvelous is that!



God does not pretend that we never offend him. Rather, he sent his Son to deal with our offences. Writes Paul, ***"For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him [Christ] we might become the righteousness of God"*** (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ, then, spotless in himself and therefore free of his own offences, becomes our sinbearer and suffers our righteous condemnation. Conversely, we, sinners by nature and by practice, receiving through faith in Christ his perfect righteousness, go free. Due to this transaction, God refuses to hold our trespasses against us (2 Cor. 5:19). Instead, by justifying us, he reconciles us to himself. ***"Since,"*** writes Paul, ***we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"*** (Rom. 5:1). God's grace toward us overcomes our war against him. Paul knew this personally. Once a seething enemy of Christ, seeking the imprisonment and death of his followers, he came by God's grace to own Christ as his peace (cf., Acts 9:5 and Eph. 2:14).

Peace of God.

Whereas peace *with* God speaks of our standing with him, the peace *of* God refers to the resultant *shalom* (or wholeness, completeness, tranquility). Recall Jesus' comforting of his disciples: ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid"*** (Jn. 14:27). He told them in effect that if he could take care of their sins and their condemnation, they would have nothing else to fear. This peace ought, accordingly, to transcend our earthly circumstances. In reality, though, our internal peace is reliant on our keeping our eyes on Christ. Recall from Old Testament times the Lord's promise to keep in perfect peace those whose minds are stayed on him (Is. 26:3). We have, after all, a heavenly Father who never lets us go, a high priest in God the Son who sympathizes with our weaknesses, and a comforter in God the Spirit who both indwells us and comes alongside us.

Peace from God.

There is coming a day when our feelings of peace will be as unalterable as our standing with God. When, at his second advent, Christ inaugurates the new or regenerated world (Matt. 19:28), God will dwell with us (Rev. 21:1-2). We who rest in Jesus—representing every tongue, nation, kindred, and tribe—shall be one nation, the new perfected Israel. There will be world peace at last, not only among the redeemed, but throughout the renewed cosmos (the far distant hell, excepted). Prophecies Isaiah, ***"no more shall be heard in it [the new earth] the sound of weeping and the cry of distress"***. Even ***"the wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain"*** (Is. 65:19, 25; cf., 11:6). This new world is the inheritance of God's people (Rom. 4:13). Our Father never dies but he delights to share it with us. There the Son of Man, seated on his glorious throne, will be eternally vindicated. In the presence of our Father, and before our liberator, we shall, in body and soul (Rom. 8:23), enjoy forever the glorious liberty of God's children. Free from sin and all its miseries!

With the church of the first century we thus cry out, "Our Lord, come!" (1 Cor. 16:22). We do so in confidence, for Christ entered our humiliation to ensure that one day we shall experience his glory. What a day that shall be! Are you ready for it? Then rejoice this Advent. If not, then look beyond the candles to Christ.

From His Fullness

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