

Away In A Manger

Week 3: Peace

Today I want you to view Jesus birth through the **eyes and ears of the shepherds** that night. They saw the sky filled with a heavenly host. It must have **looked like an invasion**. After all, the heavenly host of angels was referred to as "**heavens army**". They were the ones that we would sing about in the old, "**He could have called 10,000 angels** to destroy the world and set him free." God is referred to numerous times as the "**Lord of heaven's army.**"

It must have looked like that to them. That's why they were so **afraid**. If we had seen that today it would have been reported as an **alien invasion**, like numerous sci-fi movies.

But once they pull their hearts out of their throats and are **able to hear the angel explain**, their fear changes to amazement and joy. **This was a different kind of invasion.** It was one that after this showing of **power**, the invasion started small but grew to cover the whole planet.

This wasn't an invasion to conquered and enslaved. It wasn't about ego or a **desire to dominate**. This was an **invasion to restore what had been lost.** It was an **invasion of peace.**

What did you say? An invasion of peace **sounds contradictory.** An invasion is violent. How many people on both sides were lost in the **D-Day** invasion in WWII

on the coast of France? The end goal was peace, but the invasion definitely wasn't peaceful. **An invasion of peace...**

International Justice Mission...going into cultures of slavery and demanding justice, helping people find justice and bringing healing and wholeness in the place of brokenness.

- They collect intel.
- They send spies sometimes with hidden cameras.
- They send lawyers to embarrass authorities into enforcing the laws they already have on the books.
- They send reporters to shine a light on these deeds done in the shadows.

They go in small behind enemy lines, but the invasion grows and spreads to have a huge impact of people being freed.

That's an invasion of peace that was under way. These angels were announcing such an invasion.

The Hebrew word that would have been the frame of reference was **Shalom**.

- Shalom = to be whole or complete.

Shalom = God's highest and most complete good be upon you and all associated with you.

Thus, the peace of God goes well **beyond merely a cozy feeling or even the absence of war**; it includes a **relational harmony** that seeks a deep **commitment to the**

work of justice in truth and righteousness. The peace of God is a full, satisfying, rich, and delicious fruit of His Spirit to His people and creation. This shalom of God is intended for relational goodness and harmony through and through. **Peace is the original order of creation and remains in the heart of God for all creation.**

The Bible opens with peace, as God creates the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1-2 and closes with peace as God sets the tone for eternity in Revelation 21-22. However, the **great war leading back to restore peace** plays out between the first two and final two chapters in the Bible. **While divine plans for peace were in the works in Genesis 3,** the moment for heaven to **launch the long-awaited mission** of the Messiah ultimately and finally to deal with sin and restore peace with God was targeted on one holy night in Bethlehem.

Luke describes this scene where a young virgin named Mary gave birth to the incarnate battle plan named Jesus. The birth announcement was blared out in the fields by heavenly warriors to lowly shepherds. Only God would devise such an arrangement to restore peace to His people and His creation. The unfolding of the peculiar peace plan is recorded in Luke 2.

Let's read Luke's description of that night. ⁴ **And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵ He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.**

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷ She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. ⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven, and **peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.**" ¹⁵ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them. Luke 2:4-20

An invasion of this type happens because there are people who need help, someone needs to be rescued. **The Problem: Shalom is in disarray because of sin and Satan.**

Remember, something needs to be restored that has been lost. What has been lost is shalom. Because of sin and the deception of the enemy, people have been separated from this wholeness, this highest and best from God.

The efforts of the enemy to destroy shalom/peace.

- Addictions that lead to destruction of primary relationships.
- Hatred.
- Racism that leads to isolation, mistrust, discrimination and injustice.
- Violence from mass shootings to suicide.
- Greed that leads to crime and corruption.
- Sickness and disease that was never a part of the original creation plan.
- Fear, shame and darkness.

Sin is the source of every conflict. The plan to shine a light on the path to peace was to ultimately once and for all deal with sin. Let's go back 700 years to Isaiah.

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine...For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be

called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen! Isaiah 9:2 & 6-7

Some things need to be made right and the root cause of sin needs to be addressed. This is the problem and why we need an invasion of peace.

Something needs to be restored and it goes even deeper than peace. Peace is a byproduct of what is being restored.

That brings us to the solution to the problem. **The Answer:** "The restoration of God's rule over all things."

Did you notice that I put quotes around that phrase? Can anyone remember this phrase? This is Kingdom language.

Listen to what Jesus said in the sermon on the mount. **May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10**

Back to Genesis, or the beginning. There was wholeness, God's ultimate and highest was available to everyone. His kingdom, or rule, was over everything. There was peace, no sin or death.

Jesus was sent in this invasion of peace to begin the restoration of God's loving rule over everything.

That's the answer. "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"
Mark 1:15

It is the restoration of God's Kingdom that will bring shalom, peace, God's highest and most complete good for all.

If there is a kingdom, then there has to be a king. Makes sense doesn't it? Jesus was not only the answer. He was the plan. The Plan: Send a deliverer and preserver.

Remember this invasion has an army, but it doesn't get used. They just bring the message. The invasion party is a party of one. This is something that starts small and then builds like a snowflake that eventually becomes an avalanche. It begins in the manger, but explodes in power at the cross.

The Prince of Shalom is closely associated with the meaning of the word for "Savior," who was born in Bethlehem that first Christmas. Savior is the word "soter" in the original language. This word can be translated 'deliverer' or 'preserver'. These words are descriptors of what Jesus, the Savior, came to do on His invasion at the incarnation. He came to deliver people from the works of the devil and preserve the peace of God to the people of God so that the Kingdom of God might be experienced on earth as it is in heaven.

This is Zechariah, Jesus' uncle, prophesying over his son John, who would become John the Baptist. "And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. ⁷⁷ You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸ Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."
Luke 1:76-79

The Prince of Peace came to show and walk the path to peace.

Often, when we do not experience peace in our lives, it is when we find ourselves on paths that Jesus never intended for us to be traveling in our life. We find ourselves not at peace when we are on:

- Paths that lead to **deeper and deeper debt** instead of financial freedom.
- Paths of **negative thinking** that leads to reading and postings that don't help.
- Paths of decisions that destroy our **primary relationships**.
- Paths of **dishonesty and deception**.
- Paths that lead to viewing life as a **consumer**.

The way of peace leads from the manger in Bethlehem to the cross at Calvary.

The apostle Paul describes this peace by showing how Jesus' invasion was for everyone, not just for the people of Israel. ¹³ But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. ¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. ¹⁷ He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near.
Ephesians 2:13-17

What Jesus did on the cross was fulfill the purpose of why He was born in the first place. He came to restore peace and make a path to peace for us to walk as we follow him.

But there's more than just bringing peace... God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. Matthew 5:9

He blesses those who bring peace to others.

He had in mind people who were pursuing right relationships with the people around them in ways that led to justice, truth, and righteousness for all. Peacemaking goes way beyond just calling a truce in the middle of a fight. Peacemaking pursues the help of God in making something that has gone wrong along the way into a place where it is healed and made right. This is that concept of wholeness that stems from shalom once again.

The true peacemakers Jesus had in mind were the people who were seeking God's highest good in the lives of all those with whom they met in life.

- Peacemakers then invade new territories, push outward.
- The expanding of his kingdom is the expanding peace, Shalom of Jesus.

Biblical scholar, **John MacArthur**, references in one of his commentaries, a book called Peace Child, by **Don Richardson**. Richardson was a missionary to a cannibalistic, headhunting tribe in Indonesia known as the Sawi. The long and difficult work among these people continued to prove trying when it came to finding a way to convey the gospel message in terms they could understand in their culture. **The significance of the cross and Christ's atoning death especially was challenging to translate** into language and concepts the Sawi people could grasp with understanding in their culture.

MacArthur summarizes:

"Sawi villages were constantly fighting among themselves, and because **treachery, revenge, and murder were highly honored**, there seemed no hope of peace. **The tribe, however, had a legendary custom that if one village gave a baby boy to another village**, peace would prevail between the two villages as long as the child lived. The baby was called a 'peace child.'

The missionary seized on that story as an analogy of the reconciling work of Christ. Christ, he said, is God's divine Peace Child that he has offered to man, and because Christ lives eternally, His peace will never end. That analogy was the key that unlocked the gospel for the Sawis. In a miraculous working of the Holy Spirit, **many of them believed in Christ, and a strong church soon developed—and peace came to the Sawis.**

Jesus was the answer to the problem of sin causing people to not experience peace. **Jesus was the plan** going from the manger to the cross as King, savior, deliverer, and preserver. **He was restoring God's Kingdom, his rule over all things, beginning with people who will repent, trust, and then follow him as the way, the path of peace.**

The result is the kind of peace that God desires to reign in the lives of people as His Kingdom comes, and His will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Have you been invaded by this peace?

Steps of obedience:

1. Confront what is keeping you from experiencing peace.

Have you started down a wrong path? Have you tried other attempts at achieving some sense of wholeness in your life? Trust Jesus to bring real shalom, not diversion or distraction.

**2. Who near you needs God's "highest good" really badly?
Do one thing!**

Can I tell you how I find wholeness in my life?

3. Check out these peacemakers:

- IJM.org (International Justice Mission).
- opendoorsusa.com (Open Doors USA).

These are peacemakers who find something that is not right and asks God how he wants them to be a part of it being put right.

Jesus invaded this place to restore His Kingdom and the peace it brings to you and, if that isn't enough, you get to be a sign of God's Kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven. You are God's example of shalom to a world that desperately needs some of that good stuff.

