

The Gifts of Peace, Joy and Love

Video: Ed on Peace

We love to give gifts.

Gift giving comes natural because we are made in God's image. God is the ultimate giver. David in the old testament said, "I can give You nothing that didn't first come from You."

Over the next few weeks we'll look at gifts that we all want, not stuff, but things we really need: peace, joy, and love.

Today we will look at the first gift: Peace.

I don't know when I have labored as much over a message. I have wrestled with how to communicate this message and to what extent to share what God has been doing in my heart.

Over the past several months I have been engaging and trying to relate more and more with the needs of our community and culture and how we as the church can respond in a way that is pleasing to God.

As you begin to connect with poor and oppressed people you cannot help but identify with the need for social justice and their need for an ear to listen to them, a voice to speak outside of their closed world, and hands that will extend from the world with, to their world without. NOT JUDGMENT BUT LOVE.

During this journey it has made me look inward at some things in my life I don't like and I don't think God likes as well. This sense I deserve what I have and they deserve what they lack.

The truth is that I would rather look away and stay in the comfort of the "burbs". Staying safe, isolating myself and ignoring reality is the comfortable and easy place to be.

I had stopped thinking and caring. It didn't bother me when I read Jesus' challenge of being a peacemaker. To me that was something for anti-government, pro-choice, liberals. Peace was for pansies.

Today I want to share a little bit of my journey, some of the conclusions I have drawn and some of the changes I am making.

Some of you will say, "You're finally getting it!", thank-you for your patience. Others will say, "You've lost your evangelical conservatism", to you I would ask that you hear me, and more importantly that you hold up this mirror (showing the Bible), which is the Word of God and let it judge your heart.

I want to look at how we define peace and what Jesus has to say about peace, and finally how we can have peace in our lives and move toward a Christmas with peace on earth and good-will toward ALL men.

The meaning of Peace: Webster's Dictionary

1. The absence of war or other hostilities.
2. An agreement or a treaty to end hostilities.
3. Freedom from quarrels and disagreement; harmonious relations: *roommates living in peace with each other.*
4. Public security and order: *was arrested for disturbing the peace.*
5. Inner contentment; serenity: *peace of mind.*

This is what God had in mind when He created the world, "It was good."

Yet, God sent His Son to such a world, at such a time, to bring peace.

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined ... For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The **Prince of Peace**. Of the **increase of his** government and **peace there shall be no end**, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. "
Isa. 9:2, 6-7

"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid." John 14:27,

Man sinned and through envy, greed, hatred and violence sin began to destroy the world.

Here is where we find ourselves today. A world created for peace but with none to be found.

The below is a Christmas sermon by a pastor to his congregation on peace...

“This Christmas season finds us a rather bewildered human race. We have neither peace within nor peace without. Everywhere paralyzing fears harrow people by day and haunt them by night. Our world is sick with war; everywhere we turn we see its ominous possibilities. And yet, my friends, the Christmas hope for peace and good will toward all men can no longer be dismissed as a kind of pious dream of some utopian. If we don't have good will toward men in this world, we will destroy ourselves by the misuse of our own instruments and our own power.”

- *Dr. Martin Luther King at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Christmas Eve, 1967*

Little has changed in 40 years. Today we are in a war overseas and a heightened threat level of terrorism here.

Jesus taught what it meant to be a peacemaker. Called, “a man of peace”.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’

³⁹But I tell you, don't stand up against an evil person. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek also. ⁴⁰If someone wants to sue you in court and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. ⁴¹If someone forces you to go with him one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²If a person asks you for something, give it to him. Don't refuse to give to someone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemies.’

⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you. ⁴⁵If you do this, you will be true children of your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:38-45

“You're familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives

you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves.” Matt. 5:43-45 – The Message

This is why the church has been marginalized by society. What they see as the norm is flashy smiles, gaudy clothes, greed, and judgmental attitudes.

This is why the world points their finger at the church as hypocrites because we don’t live this way.

Listen to what Dr. King went on to propose to have peace...

“I've seen too much hate to want to hate. Somehow we must be able to stand up before our most bitter opponents and say: "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. Do to us what you will and we will still love you.

Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half-dead as you beat us, and we will still love you. Send your propaganda agents around the country, and make it appear that we are not fit, culturally and otherwise, for integration, and we'll still love you. But be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.”

That kind of Christlikeness will change the world. It has before and will again.

I know this is not popular.

“Too long have I lived among those who hate peace. ⁷ I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war.” Psalm 120:6-7

It is time we reflect God’s heart. I’m less concerned about whether it is un-American to support or be against the war. ***I am sure that it is un-Christian not to promote peace.***

There is no way to peace; peace is the way.

Who will protect us if we take this perspective? If we become “peacemakers”? The Bible says, “God causes even our enemies to be a peace with us.”

Impossible to live a life of peace if you have not met and live with the God of peace.

It starts with having a personal relationship and peace with God.

"So now, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith in His promises, we can have real peace with Him because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us." Romans 5:1, TLB

We need to promote peace for our children.

⁵Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: ⁶The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. ⁷And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

⁸“The word of the LORD you have spoken is good,” Hezekiah replied. For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime.” Isa. 39:5-8

He didn't care about his children...

Lets teach and model for our children a better way, the way of Christ.

Once we find peace, how do I keep it?

"He will keep in perfect peace all those who trust in Him, whose thoughts turn often to the Lord! ***Trust in the Lord God always***, for in the Lord Jehovah is your everlasting strength." Isaiah 26:3-4, TLB

"Happy are those who strive for peace—they shall be called sons of God."
Matt. 5:9, TLB

PRAYER:

Peace in our homes,

and our nation,
Be peacemakers,
You will have peace with God.