

THE GLORY AND THE PEACE

BY

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Angels ought to know something, and we ought to be able to learn something from their message to man. The message is well known to us all: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will” (Luke 2:14).

Apparently there was something about Jesus’ birth that glorified God. Generally it is assumed that it was the fact that God was entering the stream of human flesh, yet this fact in itself is considered as inglorious rather than glorious. Paul wrote that Christ “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant being made in the likeness of man and being found in fashion as a man” (Phil. 2:5–8). Emptying himself of the form of God and leaving the halls of heaven for the sinful and doomed world, to die as the sin-bearer, certainly was not glorious.

There was no glory obvious in the birth itself. Any human even of so great import would have been attended with great pomp and ceremony of the worldly rich and famous. Glory would have been simulated by rich appointments, great publicity, and lofty statements by national leaders. It is not by accident that the men who saw and heard the angel band were humble shepherds instead of heads of state. God by-passed the world-system because it stands condemned. God would get no glory through the vanity of men, wise and mighty in the flesh (I Cor. 1:26–28). Man cannot give glory to God in the sense of taking of his own glory and placing it upon God, rather God’s glory is that which derives from God Himself through His own work.

Where, then, was the glory of which the angels sang? It was in this: that God had displayed His power in fulfilling His word.

In the Garden of Eden God said to Satan, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; he shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). Here, as in the promise made to Abraham concerning his seed, the “seed” refers to none other than Jesus Christ. “He says not, And to seeds as of many; but as on one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). As in most predictions of things to come it was generally misunderstood. Men looked for a Messiah who, with great physical force, would set up an earthly kingdom where all the people would enjoy political security, freedom from all opposition and persecution, along with all the material things they could desire.

Isaiah further spoke of Christ’s coming in these terms; “The spirit of Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isa. 61:1–2).

If there is any scripture that could be interpreted to have fulfillment in a natural and physical realm it would be this one which speaks of liberty to captives and opening of prisons. It goes on to speak of the glory of the nation, the feeding of flocks and plowing of vineyards and the walls of Jerusalem. It is no wonder that the Israelites expected this to be fulfilled in some national victory over their political oppressors. But when Jesus was invited to speak in the synagogue at Nazareth He chose this very

prophecy of the 61st Chapter of Isaiah to read. Having read it “He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened upon Him and He began to say unto the, today has this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.”

Instead of rejoicing in this fulfillment the Jews “were all filled with wrath in the synagogue as they heard these things and they rose up and cast Him forth out of the city.” They would have killed Him by throwing Him over the cliff, but Jesus in a miraculous way passed through their midst (Luke 4:20, 28). The point of this is that Jesus himself claimed that the prophecies concerning His coming had been fulfilled by His first advent. God’s plans were absolutely colossal. His promises were:

Made to all nations,
To gather a people out of all nations,
To redeem all the lost of all time,
To establish a kingdom that would last forever, and
To save men from sin and ultimately from death itself.

The song was sung when Jesus was born into the world, but the total fulfillment of all these prophecies was something that would go through a long process including His life of sinlessness, His death on the cross, His resurrection and ascension, His endowing the apostles with power on the day of Pentecost, the gathering of all His people through preaching the gospel, and their ultimate transformation to immortality. Yet the fulfillment of the prophecy was considered as good as accomplished because Jesus was now born in the flesh and the process begun.

“God is spirit; and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Our relationship to God is a mind-to-mind relationship based upon the truth that God reveals and our faith in it. A man going on a long journey who must depend upon another for directions might find his life depended upon whether or not this other person was truthful, and being able to keep His word. The song of the angels announced that God is true; that is, the promise that He had made from the beginning had been kept.

The truth requires two things that make it hard for some to take: study and response. It requires some hard mental work to know what God has said. While the Bible is meant to be understood, it is no easy task. It is a compendium of all wisdom, compacted into one book. One phrase speaks volumes. It is easier to get a feeling or have an experience. It is easier to have a vision or to speak in tongues and feel that God is relating in this mysterious way. And it is far easier to be guided by a “sign” which we may interpret to our own satisfaction than it is to search out what the Lord has taught. Besides, experiences, feelings and signs do not necessarily require obedience. In fact, they are just the tools used to escape obedience required of truth.

God is glorified when His truth is manifest. Man is glorified when he recites his own experiences and feelings. Pagan religions produce their own kind of strange feelings and signs, but they guide no one to life eternal and God. God’s word expresses God’s desire. The fulfillment of His word fulfills His purpose and thus brings Him glory. Our own faith in and obedience to that word is the means by which we bring glory to God.

Because man has failed to see where the glory lies, he has also failed to understand the peace promised. Significantly he has had much to say about “peace and good will” and little to say about God’s glory. Unfortunately the early translators rendered the second half of the song as to say, “and on earth peace and good will toward

men.” Later translators have corrected this to read in closer harmony to the original Greek, “peace among men of good will.” But the religion of modern man is humanism which teaches that God and man is all the same thing, that there are no basic differences among men, and that Christ came to sort of ooze the feeling of peace and good will to everybody. The humanists and universalists like to think that God holds no wrath toward man, however wicked and rebellious to God he may be, and has only love, peace and good will toward all. It must be remembered that Satan’s chief characteristic is that he is a liar, and those who do not follow Christ will be deceived by Satan. Like the false prophets of old, the humanists “have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace” (Ezek. 13:10).

As if speaking to our generation, Christ said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Matt. 10:34–37). Christ divides mankind into believers and unbelievers, redeemed and unredeemed, righteous and wicked. His word is called “the sword of the spirit” and Christians are commanded to take it up and do battle against the host of wickedness.

What, then, of the peace to men of good will? Since God was being glorified by the birth of Jesus, it must follow that the rest of the song had so do with Christ’s birth. The peace come to men through Christ and only to those who have the good will to believe God. There is no promise in scripture that the sinner will enjoy peace until he is converted. “The way of the transgressor is hard” (Pro. 13:15). The nations who reject Christ “rage” and “The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against Jehovah and against his anointed, saying let us break their bonds asunder and cast their cords from us” (Psa. 2:1–3). Sin unites unbelievers against God, so that they are at enmity with God, “having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12) and condemned to death for their sin. Jesus Christ became the accursed sin-bearer (Gal. 3:3) for us, taking the death penalty as our substitute and “abolished in his flesh the enmity...so making peace” (Eph. 2:15). It is both peace with God and peace within one’s own mind.

The only peace the world knows is an outward peace enforced by physical power, where men are kept from each other’s throats by law, by force and iron bars. Jesus said, “My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you” (John 14:27). It is given only to those of “good will”, those who have the will to believe in and obey God. Peace is for Christians. It does not depend upon outward circumstances but is produced as a person believes God and acts upon this faith under all circumstances. It is the fruit produced by the holy spirit given to every Christian. “For the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self control” (Gal. 5:22).

The song does not envision a time when all men will be at peace. There will be no such time as long as the world stands. Jesus explained that tares are sown along with the wheat and there will be good and evil down to the last day until the sheep are separated from the goats. The song rather envisions peace reigning in the hearts and lives of all believers. Already Christians are at peace, one with another and with God. Paul writes that we are to “keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” We are at peace because we are in Christ, the Prince of Peace.

There is prophecy yet to be fulfilled. Jesus has yet to return, not as sin-bearer, but as King and Judge, to execute judgment upon the wicked — those at enmity with God — and at the same time redeem the righteous and give them immortality. God is able and will keep His promise. At that time we who have our faith and hope in Christ may join with the angels to sing again, “Glory to God.”

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