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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“ADVENT PEACE”

Isaiah 9:2-7; Isaiah 11:1-9

☑ Growing up, I had a turbulent, conflicted relationship with the idea and exercise of peace.

✔ I professed to have the spiritual peace of Romans 5:1: “**Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Even so, I viewed God as a harsh, demanding taskmaster who was eager to punish me when I slipped up.

✔ I embraced the promise of personal peace in texts such as John 14:27: “**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.**” Nevertheless, inner calm was elusive. Much of the time I was a seething mass of barely contained anxiety and anger.

✔ I accepted the obligation of relational peace, along the lines of Romans 12:18: “**If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.**” However, I was not at all good at it. I was a bear to live with, habitually cranky and quick to take offense.

✔ I acknowledged the call to social peace in verses like Matthew 5:9, “**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**” At the same time, I feared that most practical efforts for it were a prelude to takeover by Communists or the Antichrist.

I have been speaking in the past tense. That is not to imply that I now have perfect understanding of the biblical doctrine of peace, or that I have mastered the Christian practice of it.

☺ Still, the Lord is doing a significant work in me. By his mercy and kindness I have peace with him, I enjoy a healthy degree of personal peace, I am getting better at relational peace, and I have a growing resolve to seek social peace.

Let me briefly share a handful of the truths God is using to transform me. This might raise more questions than it answers, but that’s OK – perhaps it will inspire us to dig for the answers in God’s Word.

⚙ 1st, God values holistic peace that is spiritual, personal, relational and social.

→ One of God’s sacred names is “YHWH Shalom”, “**The LORD Is Peace**” (Judges 6:24). Another is “**God of peace**” (Romans 15:33 and at least four other passages).

- The biblical names of God are not just labels; each is a profound theological statement that discloses his character and priorities. The fact that two revolve around peace reveals that peace is fundamental to who God is and what God does.

⚙ 2nd, God has commissioned his people to advance holistic peace.

→ The Old and New Testaments record the Lord’s repeated call for us to maintain and expand spiritual, personal, relational and social peace. I have listed one New Testament example of each on the listening guide {spiritual ~ 2 Co 5:19; personal ~ Col 3:15; relational ~ Heb 12:14; social ~ 1 Ti 2:1-2}.

- The work of peace is not reserved for super-saints or the spiritual fringe; it is part and parcel of discipleship.

☼ 3rd, holistic peace begins with, and depends on, relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

→ The Savior proclaims in no uncertain terms: {Jn 14:27} **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.”**

- Secular peace efforts can reflect God’s priorities and even serve his good purposes. Yet they do not maintain *social* peace for long, and they cannot establish *spiritual* peace at all. As the saying goes, **“No God, No Peace; Know God, Know Peace.”**

☼ 4th, holistic peace is not merely the absence of conflict, it is the presence of goodness.

→ The biblical model of peace indicated both by the Hebrew word *shalom* and the Greek word εἰρήνη (eirene) includes bodily welfare, personal fulfillment, domestic harmony, shared prosperity, social justice, freedom from war and, above all, right relationship with God and others. Jesus is talking about peace in Luke 4:18-19 when he outlines his mission agenda: **“The Lord... has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

- It follows that peacemaking obliges us to seek reconciliation (which is much harder than sweeping conflict under the rug) and also the physical, economic, social and spiritual good of others.

☼ 5th, holistic peace is an objective and a process, it is both an end and a means.

→ The world tells us that peace is secured by the forceful domination of one’s enemies. Yet the Lord warns

that {Mt 26:52} **“all who draw the sword will die by the sword,”** and he teaches: {Mt 5:38-39} **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you... If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.”**

- I don’t have all the answers to the questions this raises. But this much is clear: God’s people make God’s peace only as they are reconciled to God, other individuals, and whole communities.

After the 2nd Coming {Is 11:6} **“the leopard will lie down with the goat.”** Before that time profound, unbroken, permanent peace will be unattainable. Our brokenness runs to deep, our sinfulness is too extensive.

For that reason, many in the Church speak and live as though peacemaking was none of our concern. (In fact, I am aware of a few Christians who are grimly glad for the discord and violence, because they think it will hasten the End!)

However, the Lord will return, and while we wait he calls us to be ready. Readiness is not obsessing about the timing of the Second Coming. Readiness is not fixating on the identity of the Anti-Christ. Readiness is not withdrawing from the world so that we can remain untouched while it goes to hell.

Readiness is doing the work the Lord has given us – and that includes the work of peacemaking.

If Christ returns tomorrow, will he catch us in the act of bringing peace to this broken world? *Will we embody spiritual, personal, relational and social peace?*