

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: December 4, 2011
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“PEACE FOR THE PITIABLE”

Luke 1:46-55

○ In the eighth century B.C. Isaiah foretells the Messiah’s coming with these words: **“he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, and of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.”** (Isaiah 9:6-7)

○ Six months before Jesus is born, Zechariah the father of John the Baptizer announces that

“...the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into *the path of peace.*”

(That is an excerpt from the “Benedictus” recorded in Luke 1:68-79.)

○ On the night of Christ’s birth the heavenly armies appear to shepherds and declare the “Gloria”:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth *peace* among those whom he favors.” (Luke 2:14)

○ Forty days later Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the temple to dedicate him to the Lord. {Lk 2:27, NRSV} **“Guided by the [Holy] Spirit”** Simeon approaches them, takes Jesus in his arms and praises God. His hymn in Luke 2:29-32 is called the “Nunc Dimittis.” It begins with these

lines: **“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant *in peace.*”**

→ Each witness prophesies that the Messiah is bringing peace. He himself will state, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives”** and **“in me you may have peace”** (John 14:27 and 16:33). Advent and Christmas are, truly, the *“Season of Peace.”*

Still, the arrival of the Prince of Peace is not particularly peaceful, is it?

●* What is Joseph’s initial response when he hears that Mary is pregnant with the Prince of Peace? Matthew 1:19: convinced that she has betrayed his trust, he **“[has] in mind to divorce her.”** In first century Palestine breaking off a betrothal is an extreme action of last resort. The situation is anything but peaceful.

●* What is Herod’s reaction when the Prince of Peace arrives? He orders the slaughter of every boy **“in Bethlehem and its vicinity who [is] two years old and under”** (Matthew 2:16). There is nothing peaceful about mass murder.

●* This conflict will simmer down for a while, then it will intensify again when he begins his ministry. It will keep building until it explodes in his arrest, torture, and crucifixion.

●* After Christ conquers the grave, his Father will lift him up **“to the highest place and [give] him the name that is above every name”** (Philippians 2:9). Yet even after his Ascension many fail to receive him as the Prince of Peace. To this day the name **“Jesus”**

is extraordinarily divisive, especially when it is attached to his exclusive claims such as {Jn 14:6} **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

This sparks 2 burning questions: ① *Why does the Prince of Peace’s advent ignites a firestorm of discord and violence?* And ② *What sort of “peace” is this?*

■ Please turn to the “Magnificat” in Luke 1:46-55. Mary’s Song provides some answers to our questions.

As for our first question, verses 51-55 testify to God’s **“mighty deeds.”**

✎ Deed # 1: **“he has scattered those who are proud in their innermost thoughts.”**

🕒 Mary speaks in what some call the *prophetic perfect* tense. While it sounds like the past tense it reports events that have not occurred, but certainly will.

📖 **“He has scattered.”** The Greek verb σκορπιζω (*skorpitzoo*) means **“to disperse”** or **“divide.”** In the O.T. the Hebrew equivalent describes the worst possible punishment for violating the covenant. God warns Israel: {Deut 4:25, 27} **“If you become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of... your God... The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive...”**

Among a people whose ancestors were decimated and deported, these are fighting words. Mary aims them at **“those who are proud.”**

✘ Some of the proud are the socio-economic elite whose wealth and power separates them from the poor and needy; others are the religious elite who presume that

they are able to earn God’s approval by their own effort. Many are both.

Fast forward 30 years. Most (not all) of the socio-economic elite will consider discipleship too costly and for that reason will refuse to follow Jesus. Most (not all) of the religious elite will take strong offense at the radical elements of the Gospel, and some will conspire to kill him.

“Those who are proud in their inmost thoughts” actively reject the Prince of Peace and have no place in his peaceable kingdom. They will be scattered.

The question is *does God count us among the proud or the humble?*

✎ Deed # 2: **“He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble.”**

The Messiah has not come to seize Herod’s throne by force. Likewise, {Mk 15:26} **“THE KING OF THE JEWS”** is not about to start a war of independence. Still, both Herod and Rome are right to fear the Prince of Peace.

★ 1st, worldly governments and other powers require more than mere obedience, they insist that we enthrone them in our hearts. The Prince of Peace dethrones them.

→ Every nation lusts for a booming economy and overflowing treasury, and it needs its citizens to love money and invest their lives in making wealth. But Jesus says, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth”** but **“in heaven ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”**

(Matthew 5:19-21), and **“Be on ... guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions”** (Luke 12:15 {NRSV}).

→ Every nation yearns for absolute loyalty, and it needs its citizens to embrace its loves and hates. But Jesus says, **“I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”** (Matthew 5:43-45).

→ He never calls for violent rebellion. But he does say {Mt 22.21} **“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, [but] to God what is God’s”** – and since the nations tend to demand what rightfully belongs to God, discipleship is a threat to them and those who serve them.

★ 2nd, When Jesus returns {Php 2:10-11} **“every knee [shall] bow... and every tongue [shall] confess that [he] is Lord.”** On that day the rulers of this world will literally be **“brought down... from their thrones.”**

The question is *will God lift us up with the humble or bring us down with the rulers?*

✎ Deed # 3: **“He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.”**

In 1st century Palestine the rich and powerful have access to a variety of fine foods in abundance, but the needy live hand-to-mouth. For them, death by starvation is often a real possibility.

The prevailing assumption is that having plenty to eat is proof of God’s favor, while hunger is evidence of his anger. Hence, the elite might give alms to beggars, but they are opposed to any action that will substantially improve their condition. (It reminds me of the pastor who said: {Helder Camara} **“When I feed the poor, they call me a**

saint, but when I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a communist.”)

The Prince of Peace has come for the rich, the poor, and everyone in between. Yet he identifies with the needy, calls us to do the same, and demands that at least some rich people give away all that they have.

Many who are full now think he is too extreme. They reject the Prince of Peace and will have no life in his peaceable kingdom. They will be **“sent... away empty.”**

The question is *will God fill us with good things or send us away empty?*

That is a good start on our first question. What about the 2nd? *What sort of peace is Jesus bringing?*

Part of the answer is here in the Magnificat.

🔔 Verses 46-47: It is the peace of right relationship with God, active peace that is manifested in worship (**“My soul glorifies the Lord”**), joy (**“my spirit rejoices”**), gratitude (**“he has been mindful of”** me), humble dependence on him (**“the Mighty One has done great things for me”**), and reverence (**“holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him”**).

🔔 Verses 51-55: It is the peace of right relationship with neighbor, active peace that is manifested in social equality (**“He has brought down rulers... but lifted up the hungry”**), shared prosperity (**“he has filled the hungry with good things”**), and the restoration of Israel (**“He has helped his servant”**).

It is the *Shalom* of the O.T. and the εἰρηνη (eeraaynay) of the New. It consists of spiritual holiness, civic justice, and bodily wholeness. It flourishes in a community of faith, harmony and security in which each member is united in service to the Prince of Peace, living to the glory of God and seeking the good of every neighbor.

Mary speaks with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, yet there are two great mysteries here which she does not perceive.

‡ 1st, the Prince of Peace establishes his peaceable kingdom by becoming a peace offering. **“He himself is our peace,”** and this is accomplished **“through [his] blood”** on the cross (Ephesians 2:13-14).

‡ The other is that this *Shalom* is present yet future. It began with Christ’s death and resurrection, but it has barely begun to be realized for most human beings have not yet entered the kingdom.

But Christ will return as {Rev 19:16} **“King of kings and Lord of lords,” “and of the increase of his government *and* peace there will be no end.”**

Until then, the people of God have the high and holy calling of manifesting his *Shalom*. The question is *are we receiving and sharing the peace of God?*

Luke 1:46-55 is the Word of the Lord.