

Peace and Goodwill is not a Far Fetched Illusion

War is the chief characteristic of human history. Throughout history's 5-thousand recorded years, there have been more than 14-thousand wars killing over 3-billion, 640-million people. In fact, there have been only 292 years of peace since 3600 BC. The most prolific peace movement in history flourished in the twentieth century. Yet the century closed with a third of the world's nations at war. Since WW II alone there were over 150 major wars that killed more than 23-million people. The whole world is presently tottering on the precipice of a war the ferocity and destruction of which has never been imagined.

There is not only military warfare but there is warfare of various types on many fronts of human relationships. There is class warfare, race warfare, street warfare, economic warfare, culture warfare. There is warfare among neighbors and families. There is marital warfare. This universal and unremitting warfare is why Henry Longfellow once lamented, "in despair I bowed my head, 'there is no peace on earth,' I said. For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, goodwill to men."

There is not only universal and unremitting war on earth among people but there is also personal war within. Our hearts are in regular conflict with sin, anxieties, anguishes, regrets, dreads, disappointments and fears of this life and of the life to come. And there is no effective formula for peace. There is no Geneva Peace Accord for the heart. There is no V-Day in the inner struggle.

Yet angels confidently announced "on earth peace, good will toward men" at the birth of the Savior, Jesus Christ (Luke 2:14). What could they possibly have meant? They proclaimed *a promise of God's grace that is yet to be fulfilled, but which was initiated at the Incarnation*. International peace and goodwill is a future assurance when Christ returns and reigns as King of the world! Isaiah prophesied of a wonderful time when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4). But that is only when "the Lord shall be King over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9). After Jesus arose from the dead and ascended into heaven an angel promised His people that this same Jesus will return from heaven (Acts 1:9-11). Then there will be "peace even to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:10). The Incarnation of the Son of God was the initiatory step of that ultimate blessing.

The angels sang of the real power of Christ in personal relationships. Two of Jesus' disciples, Simon and Matthew, were formerly bitter enemies. Simon was a member of a terrorist political group known as the zealots. They intended to overthrow the Roman authority in Jerusalem. The people they most despised were Jews who cooperated with or worked for the Roman government. Matthew was a Jew who collected taxes from Jews for Rome. Simon despised Matthew. But they became comrades, friends, and brothers who loved one another dearly in Christ. Saul of Tarsus was a racist who despised Gentiles. After Jesus met Saul he became the compassionate missionary to the Gentiles. In Antioch there was a church whose happy members were rich and poor, black, Jewish, and Gentile. That was an incredible social statement. But

Jesus Christ turns the hearts of His people to love one another. Wherever and whenever Christ rules in the hearts of people there is peace on earth in that spot.

But the angels also sang of a potential personal experience right now. Jesus Christ gives people that are in conflict of heart, for whatever reason, peace. Mary Magdalene was given peace by Christ when she was in deep despair over her sin (Luke 7:50). Legion was given peace when he was deeply deranged by demon possession (Mark 5:15). Martha was given peace when she was in deep distress over the loss of her brother (John 11:1-44). Jesus has a wonderful and proven message to all who are troubled of heart: “come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Jesus Christ will give you inner peace, too, regardless of your many conflicts, if you come to Him.