

**December 5, 2021**  
**Let there be peace on earth**  
**Colossians 1:15-23**

In the Old Testament, Isaiah, the prophet, looks forward to the coming of the Messiah (Hebrew), the Christ (Greek), the anointed One (English) (Isaiah 9:1-7) ...

*The people who walk in darkness will see a great light.  
For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.  
You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will rejoice.  
They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest  
and like warriors dividing the plunder.  
For you will break the yoke of their slavery  
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.  
You will break the oppressor's rod, just as you did  
when you destroyed the army of Midian.  
The boots of the warrior and the uniforms bloodstained by war will all be burned.  
They will be fuel for the fire.  
For a child is born to us, a son is given to us.  
The government will rest on his shoulders.  
And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
His government and its peace will never end.*

That sounds wonderful. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, the people of Israel were looking forward to such a time. They felt abandoned by God. Under the yoke of Imperial Rome, they felt these were the worst of times. They genuinely believed they were living in a land of deep darkness.

They expected this prophecy to be fulfilled literally: they were anticipating a time when God would send an actual military hero who would literally drive out their oppressors, who would literally reestablish the nation state of Israel better than ever before, who would literally rule in Jerusalem, who would bring peace at last. The nation Israel would be perfect.

The rest of the world? Well ... In their expectation, the nation of Israel would be an island of peace and tranquility in a world going to hell ... Who cared? As long as Israel was good.

What they did NOT expect was what God actually did care about Israel about the rest of the world, as well. God was not about to give up on ANY of His creation. So God's plan for His Messiah was that ALL people, everywhere – of every tribe, nation, ethnic group, language, ability, and background – should enjoy His blessings. A "little" god could provide for a "little" nation like Israel. The great God of creation would provide for the whole world.

In Colossians 1:15-20, Paul tells us about how God actually does send His promised Messiah, His Christ, our Saviour, Jesus ...

## ***Who is Jesus? (Colossians 1:15-19)***

*Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.*

*He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth.*

*He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.*

*Everything was created through him and for him.*

*He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.*

*Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body.*

*He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead.*

*So he is first in everything.*

*For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ.*

Who is Jesus? Jesus IS God Himself, come among us, fully human and fully God. He is God Himself, Creator, Sustainer, and Saviour of ALL His creation. What we need, when we feel like we're in a land of deep darkness, is to know God has not abandoned us. God Himself – the Messiah – Jesus has come among us. "Emmanuel" – God with us. He knows and understands our human experience. He brings us freedom from our suffering.

In December 2021, we may think we are living in the worst of times, too. And, to be honest, since March 2020, these have been a difficult 20 months. But we need to keep in mind that things were far worse in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel and at various times in global history.

Let's not downplay our current struggles. To us, our pain is very real. We are struggling. We need to know **Jesus IS still God**. He is still the almighty God of Creation. He is the Alpha and Omega, Beginning and the End. He is still the supreme Ruler of everything seen and unseen. And **Jesus is with us**, today and every day. This moment and every moment. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is with us – is IN us – now and always. The same Jesus, who was there for creation and rose triumphantly from the dead, is with US.

## ***What does Jesus do? (Colossians 1:20-22)***

*"Through Jesus, God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault."*

From God's perspective, the greatest **problem** in Israel in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century was NOT the loss of personal and national freedom thanks to the occupying Roman army, harsh taxation by the imperial government, or economic chaos caused by natural disasters and war. Their biggest **need**, then, was not deliverance from political oppression or economic renewal.

The biggest **problem** in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century WAS human hearts that no longer followed after the one true God. If you read though the Old Testament prophets (like Isaiah) who set the

scene for the Messiah's – for Jesus' – coming, you read of people who are so greedy they take advantage of the poor and widows, businessmen who cheat people, politicians who lie and rig the justice system in their favour, religious leaders who are addicted to wealth and power, people who give lip service to worshipping God but withhold their tithes and offerings (read Hosea, Micah, Malachi, and others) ... Their biggest **need**, then, was to confess their sins, return to God, and live holy lives. They need to repent. They need to change their ways. They need to live godly lives. They need a Saviour.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, Jesus and the other writers speak of the same issues: greed, stealing, sexual immorality, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, lying (Ephesians 4, Galatians 5, Colossians 3). Nothing has changed. They are repeating the judgment of the Old Testament prophets.

Much of human nature is just as "sinful" today as in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century or Old Testament times. When we read the prophets today, we read them as an indictment of our own times. The basic **problem** – sin – selfishness, greed, racism, lust, abuse, injustice, lying, cheating, anger, hostility, etc. – is just as real in 2021 as it was in biblical times. Our biggest **need**, then, is also to confess our sins, return to God, and live holy lives. We need to repent. We need to change our ways. We need to live godly lives. We need a Saviour.

1. The world of ancient Israel, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada is separated from God by our sin against God. A holy God simply cannot condone or turn a blind eye to evil. Let's be honest: each one of us has issues to deal with ...
2. The people of ancient Israel, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada are separated from one another by their sins against one another. We are guilty of hostility, quarreling, outbursts of anger, dissension, and division. Each of us has issues ...
3. The people of ancient Israel, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada don't know inner peace within themselves because of our sin either. We are unhappy, unjoyful, discontent, bitter, frustrated people who grumble through life.

The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus – beginning at Christmas – is God solving the problem of sin, once and for all. Through Jesus' birth, life, and ultimately His death and resurrection, God provides the Way for our sins to be forgiven. Once. For all. Forever.

1. Through Jesus, our sins against God can be forgiven. We have peace with God. We can have a free, open, personal relationship with Him restored again. We can know His hope, peace, joy, and love in our hearts.
2. Through Jesus, our sins against one another can be forgiven. We can have peace with one another. We can have free, open relationships with one another again. What matters most/what **ONLY** matters is that we know Jesus, King of kings, Lord of lords, our Saviour. What matters is who unites us – Jesus – is more important than anything that might divide us. Our relationships have new life, infused with the love of Jesus.
3. Through Jesus, we can know peace in our own hearts again, too. You know what? Who you are, fundamentally, is a person beloved by Jesus. Saved by Jesus. Filled with the Spirit of Jesus. Nothing else really matters. When we focus on **Jesus** as our primary identity, we know inner peace. We know true joy. We have life.

## ***How then should we live? (Colossians 1:23)***

*"You must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it," writes Paul. "Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News."*

Our challenge, during Advent/Christmas 2021 – and throughout 2022 and beyond – is to keep **Jesus** front and centre in our lives. It is SO easy to allow other things (what Paul calls "earthly things") to take the place of Jesus as the focus, and foundation in our lives. If anyone or anything other than Jesus is what is most important to us, we're missing the message of Advent/Christmas. The Bible has a harsh word for this: that person, party, or position that shapes our opinions, attitudes, and values – that is not Jesus – is an idol. We have lost our first love. Only **Jesus** can save us. Only **Jesus** can reconcile us to God. Only **Jesus** can forgive our sins. Only **Jesus** can bring us peace with God. Peace with our neighbour. And peace within ourselves. There is genuine hope in **Jesus**, no one else.

Billy Graham once said, *"Make sure of your commitment to Jesus Christ, and seek to follow Him every day. Don't be swayed by the false values and goals of this world but put Christ and His will first in everything you do."* What "false values and goals of this world" can distract us from our first and foremost commitment to Jesus?

*"Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives ... whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus,"* says Paul (Colossians 3:16-17). Billy Graham also says, *"Being a Christian is more than just an instantaneous conversion – it is a daily process whereby you grow to be more and more like Christ."* Our challenge is to keep Jesus as the centre of our lives at Christmas, but every other day of the year, as well.

*"Be the holy people God loves,"* writes Paul. *"Clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body, you are called to live in peace"* (Colossians 3:12-15).

Another one of my favourite Billy Graham quotes is this: *"God has given us two hands - one to receive with and the other to give with."* We receive hope, peace, love, and joy – life – FROM God. And we live it out. Centered on **Jesus**, we GIVE tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. In the name of **Jesus**, we forgive anyone who offends us. We clothe ourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. As the people of **Jesus**, we live at peace with all God's people ... What do I need to pray about?

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