

Christmas Eve 2024 Shaloam...Peace

My earliest recollection of Christmas was when I was about 6 years old. Christmas 1967. I remember a huge box...almost as big as me...wrapped in red Santa paper. It had a bow on it...it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I remember thinking ...surely this gift could not be for me...it is too big...too incredible...and so I asked my Mom..."Who is this gift for?" And imagine my delight when she said..."It is for you Frank" My Mom then went from hero to zero...she asked me what may have been the craziest question of all time...."Are you going to open it or just look at it?"

I love my Mom...but really? Am I going to open the most incredible gift of all time? Even as a 7 year old I knew that was a dumb question. Who doesn't open a great Christmas gift? Mom, how dumb do you think I am? You would have to be crazy to leave an unopened Christmas gift under the tree....Right?

Everyone is celebrating something tonight- For many Christmas is a very much focused on a baby born 2000 years ago.....But for many others this is a great day to celebrate, to see our families, to exchange gifts, to eat too much and to enjoy the many traditions that are part of this time of year. You can have a great time at Christmas without much thought about this baby boy born in Bethlehem.

So what's the big deal? Why are we here?

I feel somewhat qualified to answer that question tonight. In my life, I have spent about as much time celebrating Christmas without much thought of Jesus than I have with Jesus. Sure I grew up in a church.....pretty much lived there....but the story of Jesus being born at Christmas was for the most part just a necessary distraction before we got to the important things- my gifts.

By the time I was 15 I can guarantee you that Christmas for me had nothing to do with Jesus. I just couldn't get it. I couldn't see that some dude that lived in Galilee could have anything to do with me. I thought if I didn't know God then that was His fault...not mine.

I was a self professed expert on the Bible and I had not even really read it. Oh sure I knew the stories....I could name the places....I could probably pass the pop quiz on the facts.....but I never really read the Bible with any intent to actually meet God or truly try to understand what He wanted to tell me. Superficial enough to support my opinions...not deep enough to validate any of them.

As a young man I saw Christians as hypocritical. Saying one thing but doing another. Looking back now, I realize that I was actually the one being hypocritical. There was probably nothing a Christian could do that I would not criticize. Today, I can see that my heart was full of jealousy. They reminded me of something I wanted but didn't have.....Even when they were nice to me, I doubted their motives. Anytime the name of Jesus came up, I did anything to change the topic....

I couldn't deal with Jesus being the only way and Hell being the other option. God explained it all in the Bible, but like I said, I was an expert but didn't really want to know enough to change my opinion. I guess I thought I knew better than God....incredible...

I chose to do what most of my friends were doing.....I don't really need God....I can go it alone without Him...I know what is best for me. As long as I was a morally good person and cared about other people....then things will turn out ok. I never doubted that God existed....He is too obvious....but if He had made it too hard for me to trust Him...that was His fault...not mine.

From age 18-35 I lived life according to Frank. On the outside, I had it all going on. Successful, considered smart, show stopping good looks, an amazing family, a home fitting a doctor of my stature, all the appropriate bling. I had it going on.....from the view of anyone looking in. But on the inside....I was a mess.....I worried about everything. I mean everything. Money, health, people's thoughts about me, my social status, my wife, my children, my future, the Cowboys, my friends, my patients, my past, my health, everyone's health, finances, and eventually I worried about how much I was worrying. When others weren't worrying enough...I worried for them and because of them. The only thing I didn't really worry about was Jesus and all those Christians. I refused to think about them....because deep inside....that made things worse and I didn't know why.

I even worried that if I didn't worry...somehow things wouldn't turn out ok....as if I had some supernatural worry powers that held the world...at least my world together. It seemed that almost every moment of every day...I was doing a constant mental checklist....is everyone ok? Am I ok? Am I missing anything? Is anything potentially bad on the horizon? I was totally preoccupied with juggling the balls that were my life....things I thought I had control over...things that I thought totally depended upon me.

I knew all the worrying wasn't helping....but I could not stop it. So I lived in silent torture....with sleepless nights, repetitive thoughts, constant analyzing and never really being content. I didn't really realize it at the time....but I had a God complex.. I thought I held the world together, that life was all about me, that everything and everyone in my life depended upon me.

I spent six solid years....in what I call worry Hell. It is a terrible place to be. ... The best way I can describe it is a volcano.....Calm perhaps on the surface but boiling, unsettled, and churning underneath.

Now here is the interesting part- nothing had gone wrong.....everything was great.....I truthfully had live a very charmed life....but that just gave me more stuff to worry about because surely I was due for bad stuff to start happening. Crazy right?

Looking back on those days now..... I was projecting a lot. Everything I was accusing Christians of....I was doing myself. They weren't always judging me...but I was always judging them They weren't weak....I was. They weren't faking their relationship with Jesus.....I was. They weren't faking their care for me.....I didn't care about them. They weren't trying to be perfect.....I was. They weren't miserable.....I.....was. All that I wanted....the only thing I really wanted...was to be free from the prison that is worry.

But then I saw it.....

Peace. There were two to three people I knew who really had it.....they had this incredible sense of peace. They had the same issues and problems we all had....but they had something

different....something inside....an overwhelming awareness that everything would be ok. ...I began to study them.

I remember thinking that I would give anything I had to live like they did. They didn't live at peace with everyone...they were not pansies....they were not even pacifists....It wasn't that they thought about peace or marched for world peace..... what I am talking about is something about them.....something in their nature....Something I am not even sure that they see in themselves...They are on the edge of darkness riding the peace train...It is just part of who they are....They had a deep peace....it was so engrained in them it was hard to really put my finger on.. One day I got up the courage to ask my ARNP why she had so much peace.....she told me...."It isn't mine....it belongs to Jesus...He gave His peace to me. I agreed to quit trying to be God because I wasn't any good at it...and He give me His peace." That is when I realized that all these people who had peace...Had God.

That was the last thing I wanted to hear....I was miserable...but why did the solution have to involve Jesus? And worse...all those Christians...I never wanted to be one of them. But like I said I was desperate for some form of relief....I knew the peace they had was real....and I wanted it. So I dusted off my Bible and began to read everything God said about peace.

I came across some promises from the Prophet Isaiah written hundreds of years before that first Christmas night.

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV) — 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, . He would be called.....Wonderful Counselor.....Mighty God.....Everlasting Father.....and Prince of Peace.

Prince of Peace. Odd....of all the things God could have told us about the Messiah.....he chose Prince of Peace Not prince of Love, prince of hope, not prince of joy, not prince of salvation, not even prince of eternal life. God through Isaiah said people will call Him the Prince of Peace. How could Jesus be the Prince of Peace?

The last thought that came to my mind when I thought of Jesus was peace. The name of Jesus doesn't put everyone at ease. In fact ,probably one of the last things I would think Jesus brought to earth would be peace. They called him the Prince of Peace because He never once claimed to be on a mission of peace....He said His mission was the exact opposite.

Luke 12:51–53 (ESV) — 51 Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 52 For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Jesus divides families....Jesus divides friends...We see His name cause issues almost everywhere.

We live in a time where the great offense is not untruth but rather truth that is deemed offensive. A time when your character and integrity is not important just the protecting the image of it. A time when tolerance means approval and acceptance of anything someone

decides to do. That truth is what someone decides it is for themselves. And the worship of the human mind and science trumps the God who created it all.. These things directly contradict God's Word. So the teachings of God's truth...the Words of Jesus....are countercultural in our world today.

Jesus knew that when we bring God's truth into a world like ours...we will split families, break relationships and upset the status quo. You cannot embrace God's truth on issues like marriage, gender issues, sexual orientation, homosexuality, abortion, sex outside of marriage, and dozens of other topics without experiencing significant disruption in your relationships. Jesus was very clear...If you obey God...you will not be at peace with most people in this world.

But Jesus didn't come to bring a time of peace where everyone holds hands in a hippie circle and sings Kumbaya. He came to show us that the way man has decided to live is not the way God wants us to live. He came bring upheaval to the ways of this world. He came to flip tables....to get people to turn around and come back to Him.... He came to tell the world that they were still welcome to come home...That the life they were living without God was just a shadow of the life God had planned for them with Him....He came to do what every prophet had done....to try to wake people up to the truth...and reveal to them the true potential of who they were created to be...He came so they can stop living in conflict with God.

No one likes to be told that they are headed in the wrong direction....Yet that is exactly what Jesus said.....The world is not following God....and He came to tell us to turn back.....but Spiritually, they are barreling down the path of their lives and the bridge is out.....His message is actually one of love....Correction with the hope of salvation...but too often we have failed to share that message in love.

Romans 12:18 (ESV) — 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

So.....the Prince of Peace is not on a mission of peace? Jesus came to divide but told us that you are my people so live at peace with everyone? Yet the Prince of Peace...was killed because of conflict. Make perfect sense....right?

What are we missing? Let's go back to that first Christmas night where the Shepherds are out in the fields outside of Bethlehem...

Luke 2:8–14 (ESV) 8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a

multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

There it is Peace on Earth....that is exactly what I was searching for....These angels came straight from the throne of God to deliver a message on the most incredible night in human history. The message? Peace....Peace on Earth...Luke tells us...for those with whom He is pleased.....

Wait a minute.....That is not what the Christmas Cards say.....Peace among those with whom He is pleased? Hold on a second....this sounds like the peace of God is conditional. It sounds like it is only available to a select group....Those with whom He is pleased....who are they?

And yet the angels also say....This is good news of great joy for ALL the people....Jesus is the Savior of all the people....He is the promised Messiah...It seems like Jesus is good news for everyone....but His peace is only available to those who receive Him.....What happened to Peace on Earth? What happened to everybody? Is peace not for me? Something else to worry about.

If you believe Christmas Cards Jesus came to bring peace to earth.. but that is not what God's Word says. If Jesus' mission was military peace, or peace among nations...or cultures...or neighbors.....or in families,..then He failed.

Jesus came over 2000 years ago.....and the earth has been anything but peaceful since that time...in fact, much of the major conflicts we have seen in the world are because of Jesus...or at least His misguided followers..Do you remember the inquisition? The Crusades? The Holocaust? The Christianization of Native Americans? Prince of Peace....if that was His mission...to bring Peace to the World...He was a colossal failure. No Christmas Card can cover up what we all know to be true....from a perspective of world peace and conflict...the world is probably worse since Jesus has been here than before.

It is no wonder that people who get their image of Jesus from Christmas cards don't see why His coming to earth was such a big deal.

Luke 2:12–14 (ESV) —14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

The NIV says Peace to men upon whom His favor rests...The KJV says Goodwill to men. But the KJV has a superlink that says AKA whom those he is pleased.

εὐδοκία is not a classical word. It is almost completely restricted to Jewish and Christian literature, and occurs for the first time in the Greek Bible.

The original Hebrew word that had no correlation in Greek. It arose out of the need for a term corresponding to original meaning of "in agreement with"

The translation problem is that in the Greek Goodwill carries with it the image of close friendship with. But today in English it is more of a global hope for good wishes. Neither are wrong just that meanings of words change over centuries. In this case, I think the ESV and NASB best translate the original meaning.

Do you see the problem with this verse? It doesn't fit on a Christmas Card....We have taken a very specific message from God chosen in some way what sounds better. There are two things to notice in this passage....Peace on earth is promised....but it is not promised to everyone. In other words, as long as we are in conflict with God regarding our sins...we will never have peace...at least not the peace that God offers to us. True peace in this world....God says...comes only through Jesus. It is only promised to those who decide to embrace what Jesus did for them on the cross. Second, Jesus never promises world peace until His second coming.

Jesus' message?... I am not interested in the world being at peace militarily...I am not interested in families being at peace...I am here for something much more important than your short life on earth.....I am here on a Spiritual mission. I am here to offer people who choose it....Peace with God...now and more importantly for all of eternity..... I am here to bring to those who follow me....something completely different.

Jesus said...I am offering you Shaloam.

Peace in Hebrew....Shalom has nothing really to do with battles, wars or world conflict. Shalom is all about God.

Shalom is a term that Jewish people use to greet one another and to say goodbye to one another. Shalom carries with it a sense of being in the center of all that God has for you. Of being in a perfect relationship with Him, full of all the blessings he has for us, and contentment with who He created us to be. Knowing that He loves you and fully accepts you....Shaloam is being right with God....and in the center of His will....being at peace with God....The peace that God brings to earth...is a supernatural peace with God....it has nothing to do with what we call world peace.

Jesus offers this Shaloam...this peace with God....only to those with whom He is well pleased....With those who have rejected the lies of the world and embraced the truth of God. Those who have surrendered their desire to be God to the One who really is.....God said it through the Apostle Paul this way....

Romans 5:1 (ESV) — 1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me translate this verse for you. By faith we believe that our sins separate us from God. We know a Holy God can't ignore sin and some one is going to have to pay for our sins . God can't be holy and perfect if He ignores something as obvious as our sin. How can God not respond to those who cry out for justice for evil? He must in punish sin- we demand it- . Jesus went to the cross to do just that. You either believe that He took the punishment you deserve or your don't. He offers it to everyone. To those who believe...God offers Shaloam....peace with God. Why? Because he has punished Jesus in your place and all He has left for you is love and forgiveness. If you want to be at peace with God....you find it only through trusting what Jesus did on the cross for you. He is the only one that offers Shaloam. It is hard to be at peace with God when you know you have rejected what Jesus did for you on the cross. Peace is never found among the rebellious.

This struggle is the foundation of our worry. Worry is our mind desperately looking for something else in our life to do what only God can do. We are unsettled because we

were never designed to be in conflict with God. We stress out trying to convince ourselves that we are ok...but in those quiet moments of life...when we allow ourselves to go there...something is missing...and we seem to know it is spiritual. Eventually the stress becomes too much...we are juggling too many balls...trying to control a world and all the circumstances that we have no control over. Trying to be...off all things...our own God. All the while, we keep trying to convince ourselves that we have it all together and don't really need Him.

The funny thing is that I thought I was alone. I thought this was a failure on my part...some character flaw...so messed up internal wiring....I didn't know that this issue is present to some degree in everyone. I never told anyone what was really going on in my head. I didn't know that worry and feeling out of control is the universal symptom of people who don't know Jesus. You may be disagreeing with me right now...don't believe in God...don't need God....I got this...I am not worrying about stuff....Can I just tell you in love...you don't.

Everything can change in an instant....a doctor calls and says to come in....you discover your marital bed is not pure....your child gets sick and the doctor tells you to sit down....your teenage driver doesn't come home and the police are at your front door...that drink has become more important to you than those you love.....the thing that you were depending on is no longer dependable....Things are out of control...and you finally realize you are powerless to change it...

You come to that moment when you realize that you have lost the control that you actually never actually had....I see it everyday....in medicine and in ministry. People who are forced to deal with their mortality....their need for a power greater than themselves....they discover that their self sufficiency is a house of cards...they know two things...they aren't god and they need God. But their pride has always kept them from admitting it.

I know because I lived in the hell that is worry for years. I kept thinking if I could just do more....earn more...plan more...control more...that the worry would go away. It is a horrible way to live. And one day...I faced a situation...that brought down my house of cards. I couldn't pretend any more...I was broken and cried out to God to help me.

I was immediately flooded with peace. The good news of great joy means that once we surrender to God....we are immediately at peace with Him....the sin in our lives that has always made us cringe at the thought of God....is gone....we know that through Jesus we are in good standing with God.....we don't have to worry about our relationship with Him anymore..

In fact, what you think of when you think of God is probably the most important thing about you. It is the litmus test of where you stand with God. When you allow yourself to think about God....do you feel love and acceptance.....or judgment, fear and punishment? Do you bask in His Shaloam? Or worry about what He would say?

The message of Christmas proclaimed by the angels that night, promised that God was offering to restore His relationship with every human on earth.You can have Peace

WITH God.....you just can't have peace with God while you are still pretending to be God.

God's Shaloam...is the greatest feeling on earth.. Being at Peace with God....what a great way to live....what could be better than knowing at every moment of your life that God is your greatest cheerleader....that He loves you....unconditionally....that He is guiding you and blessing you....and sees only who you will become...not who you have been...Talk about peace...can it get better than that?...Well actually....yes.

Philippians 4:5–7 (ESV) — The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Once you become a follower of Jesus...you not only have Peace With God...you receive the PEACE OF GOD. Interesting that this promise comes on the back end of a command not to worry. It is almost as if God knew that worry is a barometer in any situation of our faith in God.

We are not only promised peace with God...we are promised the peace of God....It comes from heaven....to those who believe in Jesus....It is a supernatural peace....a peace that we will never understand...it surpasses all human understanding....and this peace of God...is like a covering of protection....God tells us that the peace of God coats us...it guards our heart and our mind....it calms our heart...it calms our thoughts...We can't explain it..God says it is beyond our comprehension....all things from heaven are like that....we don't know how we got it...but once we started the journey of continuing to surrender to God's ways...it has been growing in us....It is not something that we do...it becomes who we are. And others who are looking for it...set it.

So the Prophets said He would be the Prince of Peace....The Angels proclaimed Peace with and of God...and then in some of His final words on earth...Jesus wants to make sure we don't miss the whole point of Christmas.

John 14:27 (ESV) — 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Jesus has a gift for those who are chose to be His disciples...His followers....the gift comes straight from heaven...it is not of this world....."My peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not like the peace of the world" Don't let your hearts be troubled and don't be afraid---- translated....I am going to give you my peace...from heaven...it is a peace that you will never find on earth on your own.. I am offering you my eternal Shaloam.

The angels nailed it....Christmas in one word? Peace....Shaloam. That is the gift of Christmas...Jesus came to die for you so that you could receive.....first peace with God ..then the heavenly peace of God....

It is Christmas Eve.....and none of us are promised tomorrow. The most incredible gift of your life has been wrapped by God. He has put your name on it....He did everything just for you.....including getting you to this service to hear this message. But, a gift is not a gift until you choose to receive it.....So...This moment is all about you.... as my Mom would say....Are you going to open it....or just look at it? If you want to know more about how to get this peace tonight.....please come talk to me after the service. Peace of God...Peace With God....Shaloam....let's pray.