



Intro |

So how many Christmas Cards have you already received? I've already got three sitting on my living room table.

And while there are a host of messages decorating each of these cards, one of the most popular is the words "Peace on earth and good will to all."

Why is this one of the most popular?

Because it is not hard to hear the cry arising from almost every heart is "World peace".

Is this not what we all desire most? An end to conflict. An end to wars. An end to corrupt leaders doing horrendous things to either their citizens or another nation's citizens.

And as people of hope, year after year we sing hymns and carols which proclaim that Jesus was going to bring "peace on earth."

We know that Isaiah prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, that He would be "called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" ([Isaiah 9:6](#)).

That's why on the night of Jesus' birth, the angels proclaim the good news to the shepherds, again emphasizing the peace that God was promising through his Son.

They declared "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests" (Luke 2:14).

They were declaring that Isaiah's prophecy was being fulfilled.

Even old Zechariah, who was overjoyed at the announcement of the birth of his son, sang, that the promised One who was coming would, "shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death and guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:79)

But, as I sit watching the news in the evening, I find myself asking, "How exactly does Jesus bring peace on earth?"

I mean, if you were asked that question, how would you answer?

Before we respond, we need to keep in mind that Jesus in fact downplayed His role as Prince of Peace.

While warning His disciples of the hardships they were about to face in their ministry, He said, "Do not assume that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'A man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a

daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household" (Matthew 10:34–36).

So although Jesus is indeed the Prince of Peace, the kind of peace He brings is not necessarily what most people are thinking of when they hear of "peace on earth" at Christmas time or see slogans advocating "world peace."

Yet our hearts still long for 'peace' in every sense of the word.

I'm not the only one who has said, "I just need a little peace!"

This cry indicates that peace is needed in a wide variety of contexts.

Firstly, we need peace when we struggle with inner conflict.

People everywhere are struggling with doubts, fears and uncertainties. They are in dire need of inner peace.

Here in our own community, mental health is one of the biggest areas of concerns.

In fact, professionals tell us that the Christmas holidays, the time of "peace on earth," is often one of the most depressing as expectations go unmet and stress multiplies.

However, as well as inner conflict, there is relational conflict, where people struggle with other people.

Week after week, as I invite people to join us at the table of Dinner Church on Tuesday evenings, people will look longingly at the empty table, and explain to me that while the thought of eating with other people is a great idea their own struggles with social anxiety prevent them from coming.

In another yet strangely related context, some people who come in for emergency relief, are also living in their cars or isolated camps. Why? Because, having been hurt in the past, they no longer trust people, or they don't trust themselves to be able to be close to those who may harm them.

Or I could mention family conflicts, marital conflicts, workplace conflicts, squabbles between fellow believers, and even conflicts with total strangers.

And because of these conflicts in relationships between people, is it any wonder that international conflicts arise?

Our hearts weep that the very streets of Jerusalem where Christ walked, is one of the least peaceful of all places on earth.

However, while the need for inner peace, relational peace, and international peace is clearly recognized by most people, there is one other kind of peace that rarely gets a mention.

Yet this peace is our most pressing need.

We all need peace with God.

The universal human response to the reign of God is open rebellion against Him.

This is how Paul describes those who have not yet come to Jesus Christ:

⁶ When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ...

⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹ And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. ¹⁰ For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. ¹¹ So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.

Jesus did indeed come to bring peace on earth. However, first and foremost, He came to make peace between God and rebellious, sinful human beings.

Jesus paid the penalty for our sins so that God's punishment for our sins could be forgiven and we could have peace with God.

This peace and forgiveness are available to anyone who trusts Jesus for their salvation.

That's why Paul wrote, "Since we have been made right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

However, there is another way Jesus brings peace on earth. That is, by sending the Holy Spirit to live within those who accept Him as their Saviour.

And when the Spirit enters the heart of this saved one, He changes them and deposits within them a measure of God's peace.

That was one of Jesus' promises to those who trust in Him, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

This is the inner peace that Jesus provides.

Thomas Watson, an English Puritan preacher in the 16th century once said,

"If God be our God, He will give us peace in trouble. When there is a storm without, He will make peace within. The world can create trouble in peace, but God can create peace in trouble."

And having the presence of the Spirit of Peace in our hearts changes how we relate with others.

The more we grow in spiritual maturity, humility and love, the more we become Christlike people.

Because God's peace is within us, we strive to bring peace into situations, conversations and conflicts.

Because God has shown us forgiveness, we have a capacity to show forgiveness to others.

However, because we live in a world which is in rebellion with God, and under the rulership of God's enemy, conflict may actually get *worse* when a person tries to live authentically as an ambassador for God's peace in the world.

This is what Jesus was speaking of when He said He did not come to bring peace to the earth (see Matthew 10:34-36).

Jesus warned of the persecution that will come to His followers when they confront a world that rejects Him.

Yet, in spite of the turmoil that may result from living a courageous Christian life, no person can steal the inner peace God grants those who trust in Him.

But what about the "peace on earth" that the angels proclaimed at Jesus' birth?

Jesus' first coming did not bring international peace; however, He promised that He would come again.

And this is hope of peace that we long for when we pray, "May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

When Jesus returns, His reign will be supreme and every nation will live in obedience to Him – that is the picture of world peace we long for (see Micah 4:2-4; Isaiah 2:4).

In summary, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, came to provide the way for all people to have peace with God the Father, through believing in His Son Jesus.

To each who receive Jesus, is given His peace, which empowers them to extend peace to others.

However, just as Jesus suffered persecution, so too will His followers.

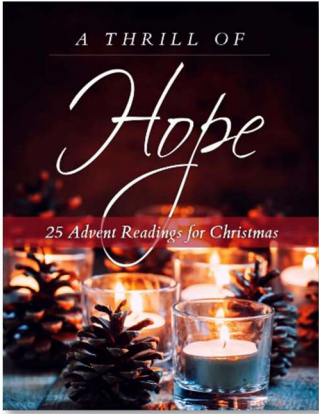
Yet, even in persecution, we can experience the peace of God.

Allow me to close with words spoken by Corrie Ten Boon. A young Jewish girl who spent years in a concentration camp, only to later forgive the very German officer who so brutally tortured her. She said,

"If you look at the world, you'll be distressed.
If you look within, you'll be depressed.
But if you look at Christ, you'll be at rest."

May we look each day at Jesus Christ and experience the peaceful rest only He can provide.

The Thrill of Hope Advent Devotional



The famous Christmas Carol "O Holy Night" has a line in one of its verses:

"The thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices."

It is worthy of pondering whether you are 'thrilled with hope' ...

To assist you on your journey through Advent we have made available a "Crosswalk's" Advent devotional inspired by this carol, entitled "A Thrill of Hope".

This devotional contains 25 readings and can be picked up in the foyer of the Church.

May you experience the thrill of hope this Christmas season.