

What the World is Seeking

Isaiah 9:1-7: But there shall be no more gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time, he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time he has made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined. 3 You have multiplied the nation. You have increased their joy. They rejoice before you according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the plunder. 4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as in the day of Midian. 5 For all the armor of the armed man in the noisy battle, and the garments rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire. 6 For to us a child is born. To us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, on David's throne, and on his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from that time on, even forever. The zeal of Yahweh of Armies will perform this.

Peace! Joy! Goodwill to all people!

There will be those people all over the world—in your neighborhood, in the neighborhoods of South Africa, and every other neighborhood—who will be seeking these things this Christmas season—Peace! Joy! Love! Goodwill! But they won't find them.

They might find a new iPod under the tree and they might find a new car in the driveway and they might find a pair of fuzzy slippers and some dusting powder at a family gathering. They will probably even find Christmas cards in their mailbox which say, "Peace!" and "Joy!" and "Love!" and "Good Will!" in this season of hope. These things are the theme of the season—especially for those who are even faintly aware of the Christmas story.

Luke 2:8-14: There were shepherds in the same country staying in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. 9 Behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all the people. 11 For there is born to you today, in David's city, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 This is the sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a feeding trough." 13 Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army praising God, and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men."

Still, the angel's words ring hollow for many.

The angel shouts "Peace!" and we human beings hear him deep in our soul and we respond by seeking that peace—but in the world, we understand peace to be the absence of war or other conflict. We talk about it and desire it, but the world has not ever really seen it—not in that sense. There has always been conflict between neighbor and neighbor or king and king or even man and wife—and there always will be.

As we, the children of God shout the Good News ourselves, our theme is peace—peace with one another, but more importantly, peace with God. Because even if we were able to live in peace with one another—there is natural conflict between a holy God and sinful humans. Our Good news, just like the angel’s Good News, is that God has sent the ultimate gift of peace in his son.

First, this was predicted in the Isaiah passage I read earlier. Then, we heard it in the announcement of the angel.

We also hear it from Jesus in John 14:25-27 *I have said these things to you, while still living with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, give I to you. Don’t let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful.*

He tells us that the peace we human beings are seeking can be found in knowing him and in having the Holy Spirit of God in our hearts and lives. The world wants peace—and the Good News is that we Christians know how to find it.

The season is also one of declaring and seeking joy. Again, we see “joy” in the words of the annunciation angel—bringing good tidings of great joy. The world is seeking joy, but doesn’t understand it. We think joy can be achieved by getting things and by having our lives go the way we want. The world tells us that joy is a perfect mate and a fine house—with room in the garage for another expensive car. We see it in the faces on our Christmas cards. We sing about it. We seek it but don’t find it because the world doesn’t know what true joy is.

Jesus tells us what real joy is in Matthew 13:44: *“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and hid. In his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.*

Real joy is finding the kingdom of God and becoming a part of it.

Paul also speaks of joy from the Christian standpoint in Acts 20:22-24: *Now, behold, I go bound by the Spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there; 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions wait for me. 24 But these things don’t count; nor do I hold my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to fully testify to the Good News of the grace of God.*

According to Paul, Christian joy comes, not from possessions, nor circumstances, nor station in life—for a believer, real joy comes from staying the course, from being true to the finish. The Good News is that even though things can be stolen and things break and relationships can be shattered—real joy can be found in a relationship to God through Christ—and through the work he has for us.

In this season of giving and love—this season where the world is declaring and hopefully seeking joy and peace--it is only right that we tell them where to find these things.

Psalms 38:15—and a host of other verses of scripture—tell us that our only real hope is in God and in the love of God. The Good News of the annunciation angel is that there is real hope in God and that God wants to give it to us.

In this season, we speak over and over again of love. What is real love? Scripture tells us that real love is this: “while you and I were still sinners and lost—God loved us so much that he sent his Son—to make a way for you and me to find the kingdom of God.

In this season of joy and peace and hope, you and I—the people of God—know the source of these things. The source of these things is the love of God. With God as our source, we are commanded to share that love—with the world and with each other.

1st John 4:7-21 tells us what God’s love looks like in us believers: *Beloved, let’s love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God. 8 He who doesn’t love doesn’t know God, for God is love. 9 By this God’s love was revealed in us, that God has sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice* for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God loved us in this way, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we remain in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him, and he in God. 16 We know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. 17 In this love has been made perfect among us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, even so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love. 19 We love him, because he first loved us. 20 If a man says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who doesn’t love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 This commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should also love his brother.*

The Good news is that God loves us more than anything. The Good News is that God didn’t even hold back his only Son.

As we come almost to the end of this Christmas season, let us remember where to find real peace and real joy and real hope and real love.

Let’s remember that much of the world is seeking those things, but may never find them—unless we share what we know—that God so loved the world that he send his only Son into the world to redeem it and to make us his own.