

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Christmas Peace*

**SERIES:** *Advent 2021: Hope, Peace, Joy, Love*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 2:13-16;*

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*\*Credit to Bible Project;*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church this morning. We are in the midst of the advent season. (**SERIES TITLE SLIDE**) This is a time when we remember Christ's arrival as a baby at Christmas and anticipate His coming again.

And there are 4 specific words that are associated with the advent season: HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE. And so we're looking at the significance of these words over the next few weeks as we prepare for Christmas.

Last week we talked about HOPE. This morning as we just heard in our advent reading, we want to talk about PEACE.

## **I. Understanding Peace**

Now when many people think of peace they often think of "the absence of conflict." And certainly that is a part of peace. But once again that's not a complete understanding of Christian Peace. So let's look at Peace as described in Scripture.

And again, we'll using resources from the Bible Project to help us understand this concept. The primary word used for peace in the Bible is an OT word, that I suspect some (even many) of you are familiar with. The word is...

## **A. Shalom**

Shalom is a much more comprehensive word for peace than simply “absence of conflict.

One author defines Shalom this way,

*Shalom* is the Hebrew word for peace... which means....wholeness, health, and blessing. Shalom is the harmony God intends for the world. Shalom is how God wants things to be. Shalom is peace with yourself, with your neighbor, with the earth, with God.

Biblical shalom has a sense of completeness or wholeness to it.

Solomon brings shalom to the temple when he completes it.

Do you like putting puzzles together. It’s one of the things our family like to do around the holiday season. But do you know one of my pet peeves...a missing puzzle piece. You spend hours, over several days putting this thing together and one piece, there’s always one piece missing. And it just feels incomplete. Shalom is complete...

It is to make something whole again.

So let’s look at three different aspects associated with biblical shalom.

First, in the Bible, Shalom most often refers to...

### **1. Material and physical well-being**

**Genesis 37:14** Joseph is asked by his father, Jacob, to go and check on his brothers.

**14 So he said to him, “Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.”**

He’s not saying, “Go and make sure they’re not in a war. (Maybe, but not primarily). Go and make sure their sins are forgiven before God.”

No, he saying, “Go and check on your brothers’ physical well-being. Make sure they have food to eat, make sure they have enough blankets, make sure they’re not sick or hurt.”

Head to the New Testament, same idea...(a different word than Shalom, but same idea).

**James 2:15 - <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?**

Can’t have complete biblical shalom, you can’t talk about peace in this world unless physical needs are being met.

Let’s add something else to that. Hebrews also used this word, Shalom in regards to...

## **2. Healthy relationships**

**1 Kings 5:12 - <sup>12</sup> The LORD gave Solomon wisdom, just as he had promised him. There were peaceful relations between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty.**

These two kings are getting along with one another.

What is your favorite Christmas movie? It's a wonderful life, A Christmas Carol, Home Alone, White Christmas...there are hundreds of them. But one of the things that is similar in just about every Christmas movie is the restoring of broken relationships...the coming together of two opposing groups.

One of my favorite Christmas movies is the Grinch. And one of the scenes I love comes right at the end

**With a smile to his soul, he descended Mount Crumpet  
Cheerily blowing "Who! Who!" on his trumpet.**

**He rode into Whoville. He brought back their toys.  
He brought back their floof to the Who girls and boys.**

**He brought back their snoof and their tringlers and fuzzles,  
Brought back their pantookas, their dafflers and wuzzles.**

**He brought everything back, all the food for the feast!  
And he, he himself, the Grinch carved the roast beast!**

He made peace with the who's. They even gave him the seat of honor at their feast.

True Biblical Shalom happens when there are healthy relationships between people and nations.

Finally, third component...shalom does have this spiritual aspect as well.

### **3. Peace with God**

**Romans 5:1 - Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we<sup>al</sup> have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,**

Shalom happens in my life when I am in good relationship with God. I have received Christ's forgiveness, and Jesus is Lord of my life.

Biblical shalom is all-encompassing. **It's physical well-being; it is healthy relationships, it is peace with God.**

Let me just make one final comment related to shalom. Just as, last week, remember we saw that hope was fulfilled in Jesus.

### **B. Jesus and Shalom**

The same is true of Peace. The authors of the Bible associated the Messiah, the baby born in Bethlehem, with the fulfillment of peace...shalom.

Prophet Isaiah wrote, **Isaiah 9:6-7 - <sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.**

Shalom, is tied to, linked to, finds fulfillment in the Christ child.

This is why Jesus birth in the New Testament is announced as the arrival of shalom.

When the birth of Jesus is announced to the Shepherds Luke 2 -

**<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,**

**<sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."**

**<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger**

The arrival of Jesus marked the fulfillment of Shalom on earth. And that is why during advent we celebrate and reflect on the peace Jesus came to offer our world.

Sadly, as with so many other aspects of our Christian faith. Peace is often seen as wishful thinking, unrealistic. We live in a world of brokenness. Physical and material brokenness. Relational brokenness. Spiritual brokenness.

You can't help but look around at our world and say, "Something has gone terribly wrong."

Any Star Wars fans out there? If you're a real fan you know that in one of the original movies there is scene where Obi Wan (**PIC OF OBI WAN**) is talking to Luke Skywalker as Luke is doing some of his Jedi training. And at one point Obi Wan sits down and says, "**There is a disturbance in the force.**"

What he means is..."I've got a feeling there is something wrong."

A disturbance is a lack of shalom. A disturbance, is when things are not what they were meant to be.

Maybe you've heard of a **peaceful night of sleep**. That's when you slept through the night as you were intended to sleep. And if you know what that's like, it's because you don't have little children living in your house.

When our children were very young, almost every night there was a disturbance in the Kipe house hold. We tried to explain to our three children...that sleeping through the night is Shalom. Because it's how God intended humans to live. When they wake up in the middle of night, they don't seem to grasp the magnitude of what they've done. They are causing a disturbance in the force, they are rearranging the world order. It never fails middle of the night, you get this creepy feeling someone is

watching you and you roll over and there are these little eyes peering at you over the edge of the bed. It's a little disturbance in the force! Peace in our house were those nights, when everyone slept the whole way through the night. And it was usually because I gave the kids Dramamine before bedtime, please don't tell Jenny. (Just kidding, I didn't actually do that.)

But we live in a world of disturbances...where **physical and material** needs are not met, **relationships** are falling apart, and where there is **no peace with God**. And perhaps it makes us wonder if shalom is really possible. And so God sent Jesus.

In Jesus, peace enters our world. We might say, peace invades the disturbance. Peace takes up residence in the middle of the warzone. And Jesus came to start a community of peace. A group of people who would overflow with shalom to the rest of the world. We are now called to be agents of peace...taking what is broken and restoring it to wholeness and completeness.

## **II. Agents of Peace**

There's this fascinating story, I just love...legendary story about Christmas Eve in 1914, WWI. Germans and British hated enemies. But a legendary story about a truce that some believed happened on Christmas Eve that year...and I think it's one of the most powerful images of shalom I've seen...check out this video...

**VIDEO** - Play video from link below. Cut video off at 3:11.

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/ww1-soccer-photos/>

Every time I imagine what Christian peace, should look like in the middle of a broken world, this is the image that comes to mind. As followers of Jesus, we are supposed to be the cease-fire for our world. The place where enemies lay down their weapons. The place where chocolate bars and wafers are shared with the hungry. Where

names and faces and relationships are learned and built up. Where everyone is viewed in the image of God.

It's a truly incredible story. Do you know why we love that, because we all look at that and say, "Yep that's what it's supposed to be like." This is God's intention for our world. That's a picture, a vision of shalom and it's what we are yearning for in our own lives. A time when peace on earth is a real thing.

It's not just you, it's your families, it's your neighbors, it's your co-workers, in fact its all of creation. Yearning for the way it's supposed to be.

The advent season is when we are reminded that the disturbance is not the final word. Christmas is when shalom breaks into our world...to set things right.

If you've been experiencing disturbances this past year, if you're living in the midst of a disturbance, or if you know someone who is...let me suggest three ways we can be agents of peace. First, we must remember, that peace...

### **1. It's on its way.**

One author defined peace as **"the rest of will that comes when we are assured of ultimate outcomes."** One day all things will be set right.

This definition helps me to remember this future aspect of peace.

Jews believed in the future promise of shalom. Isaiah's prophecy that we read earlier. That was a couple hundred years before Jesus, before the baby in the manger. It was the future promise they held onto, relentlessly.

And here's the amazing thing, our story, the Christmas story, reminds us that we also have a future promise of shalom. In the same way the Jews were waiting for the

Messiah to come and make all things right, we believe Jesus will keep his word. He is going to come again and set all things right.

When we are in the midst of the disturbances, we don't necessarily feel or experience peace and sometimes all we can do is hold onto the future promise.

That may be why you're here this morning. You needed to be reminded that peace is on its way. Why we want you here next week and the week after...because we believe that we have a grand story about the coming of "the way things are supposed to be." We are holding out, waiting, because we believe the fullness of shalom is on its way.

Maybe what you need to hear this morning is this, "Hang in there, because peace is on its way."

Had a bad week, had a tough year. Struggling to get up in the morning. Hang in there, peace is on its way.

Lost your job, lost a loved one. Peace is on its way.

Temptation got the best of you this week. Hang in there, peace is on its way.

We believe peace on earth is coming. That future peace, gives us hope that others don't have. It get us out of bed in the morning. Maybe that's what you needed to be reminded of this morning.

But there's more to our story. It's not just a story about a future peace, when things will be set right. That's where most of us get stuck isn't it. Future seems so far away, I am hurting right now.

And what's so profound and what I love about the WWI story, did you notice this, maybe most important thing for us to understand right now, is that **peace happened in the midst of the war.**

## **2. Peace right now.**

The Christmas story doesn't just give us hope about future peace, but it's God looking down and seeing all of the brokenness and sending his prince of peace into the war zone. It's that **peace is not the absence of trouble. Peace is the presence of God in the midst of trouble.**

Now this is really important. Some people think that shalom will only be possible in eternity. And it's true that the peace may not be fully realized here in our world today. But the Christmas story says, heaven's peace breaks into our world!

See the Jews waited hundreds of years for the Prince of Peace and then He came...

**Luke 2:8 & 13-14 - a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."**

Peace comes right down into the war zone. And a fascinating thing begins to happen with this baby, everywhere he goes Shalom starts to happen...

**Luke 7:20-22 - <sup>20</sup> men came to Jesus, and said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'"**

**And Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy<sup>[a]</sup> are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.**

Shalom starts happening. And he would say things like...

**John 14:27 – <sup>27</sup> 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.**

**Matthew 11:28 - <sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**

You see we often think that we won't find peace or we can't have peace until the future finally comes. Or that peace isn't possible, while we're in the war zone. The story of Christmas reminds us that Christian peace comes right down in the midst of the war zone.

You know how it happens. When you build your life around the Prince of Peace. He becomes the focus, the priority of your life. Problem for most of us is that we've built our lives on other things. Financial security, materialism, technology, our families, sports...build your life on that you won't find peace.

Apostle Paul was writing from prison to the church in Philippi and he said,

**Philippians 4:12-13 - <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.**

Peace finds its way into your war zone, as you make Jesus the focus of your life.

**Matthew 6:25 - <sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear...<sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

Shalom makes its way into our lives as we know and love and follow Jesus.

Third, as we think about the all-inclusive nature of Shalom. Remember Shalom isn't just about peace with Jesus. Shalom is when the world is set right. Jesus has passed his mission of shalom to us, the church. That's why we're talking about being agents of peace...the writes of the Bible use the phrase...

### **3. Peace-makers.**

The Church is supposed to be a symbol of shalom in the world. We are supposed to start living in the reality of that Kingdom now. What did Jesus say, "on earth as it is in heaven." Up there is coming down here...that was Jesus in the manger. That's what the church represents as the body of Christ in the world.

**"Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God."**

**"If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty give him something to drink."**

**"As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."**

Peace-making is one of the primary characteristics of Jesus people.

My fear with our understanding of peace is that so often we individualize and spiritualize peace to the degree that it paralyzes the church from going into the war zones and setting things right. *"I asked Jesus into my heart. That's the most important thing. And if I happen to get around to meeting physical needs...that's just icing on the cake. A bonus."* But that's not Shalom.

Remember what did James write...**"If you say to a brother or sister, go keep warm and well fed but do nothing to meet his physical needs...such religion is worthless."**

Remember can't have Shalom where physical and material needs are not being met. Can't have Shalom where relationships are broken. Shalom goes into the war-zones in our communities, in our world to bring wholeness, material and physical wholeness, relational wholeness and yes, spiritual wholeness to those who don't have it. It's not an add-on to our faith. It's part of our identity as followers of the Prince of Peace.

Where people are starving. We feed them.

Where people are oppressed or war torn. We stand up against oppressive powers.

Where families are broken or hurting, where young people are lonely. We find ways to love them.

And this is why, finally, we must learn...

#### **4. A life-style of peace.**

Christian peace is not a goal to be achieved by any means necessary, it is a lifestyle...that is lived out in every interaction, each and every moment of every day. Peace is a way of life.

The great reformer Martin Luther King Jr. once remarked...

***“The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate...Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”***

And this should actually sound very familiar to a passage of Scripture:

Jesus said...“You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemies...Do not resist an evil person...If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile go with them two miles...Do good to those who persecute you that you may be children of your father in heaven!

Peace is in the way...

The way you speak to your kids.

The way you coach athletics.

The way interact with a stranger at the grocery store or a conversation on your social media page.

It all matters, because it is a reflection of your faith. Peace is not just something you try to do every once in a while it is your way of living life.

Peace is not a goal to be achieved by any means...it is a lifestyle. The life-style of Jesus.