

## A Christmas Hope for New Hope Church

My hope and prayer for all of us this Christmas is that we may know and experience the peace of Christ. Describing the Messiah, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, said, He will *"guide our feet into the path of peace"* (Lk. 1:79). Isaiah declared the coming of the Messiah when he wrote, *"And He will be called... Prince of Peace"* (Is. 9:6).

Sadly for many, the celebration of the holiday magnifies the unrest of people's souls. A story is told about a man angrily honking his horn in a traffic jam. A woman in the car in front of him rolled down her window and yelled, "And, what else did you get for Christmas?" Into this angry world, Christ came to bring peace.

Christ's peace is far different from that which the world offers. Jesus said, *"... My peace I give you... I do not give to you as the world gives"* (Jn.14:27). People often think of peace in terms of detachment. We will have peace when the kids go to bed, when the yelling stops, when everybody lets me alone, or when I can finally not feel the hurt. We seek to experience peace by numbing ourselves to the pain in us and around us. Peace often becomes a temporary, mind-numbing escape from the pain of our lives. This is not peace and certainly not the peace that Christ brings.

Biblical peace is well expressed in the Hebrew word, "shalom." Shalom is wholeness, fullness of life, a sense that everything is going to be okay, even when everything is not okay. This is the peace that Jesus Christ has achieved for us. He went to the cross and paid the penalty for our sin-producing unrest. The gospel is, *"For Christ himself is our peace..."* (Eph. 2:14). So, how do we experience such a soul rest in a season that magnifies the unrest in our world?

**First, we must place our faith in Christ, our Savior.** *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."* (Rom. 5:1). When we receive Christ by faith, our spirit is united with Christ's Spirit, the Holy Spirit. His Spirit gives us the assurance that everything is going to be alright, even when everything is not alright.

**Secondly, we must learn to commune with the Prince of Peace through prayer.** *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:6-7). When we pray, Christ, the Sentinel of our minds, guards our peace.

**Thirdly, we must promote peace in our perspective.** *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things"* (Philippians 4:8). Christians lose their peace because their minds become poisoned with anxious and discouraging thoughts. This is the opposite of the peace that is promoted through "right" thinking.

**Fourthly, we must practice peace.** *"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from Me, or seen in Me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you"* (Philippians 4:9). As we struggle against negative thoughts and strive to put on biblical thoughts...as we practice peace emotionally and relationally...as we preach the gospel of the Prince of Peace, the promise is not only that we will know peace with God, but that we will experience the daily peace of God in the core of our soul.

As your new pastor and fellow Christ-follower, my prayer for us this Christmas is, *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"* (Rom. 15:13).

Great peace in the Lord,

Eddie