

Peace on Earth

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Preacher: Donald Smith

[0 : 00] Amen. I love a zoo. Yeah, it's been far too long since I've been to one.

It's why I think Aberdeen's really missing. No offense to Pet's Corner, but we need more lions, don't we? So the difference between a good city and a great city is a good zoo, in my opinion.

That's probably not official. But zoos are great, aren't they? Because you get to see a whole load of animals that otherwise you'd never see together anywhere else. But part of that is just simple geography, isn't it? The chances of you seeing a polar bear and a giraffe nearby in the wild are pretty slim. But that's not the only reason, is it? Because what would happen if, well, let's just take the animals we read about there in Isaiah chapter 11. What would happen if you had a zoo full of lions and tigers and deer and antelope and wolves and leopards and sheep and goats? What would happen if you had a zoo with all those animals, but you decided to get rid of all the fences?

I mean, you probably wouldn't be walking around for a start, would you? And I suspect you wouldn't see the cow happily grazing on the grass while the lions slurp up some of the water in the nearby pond.

The wolf and the lamb probably wouldn't decide to become best friends and head off to do their Christmas shopping together. But here's what we're going to see this morning.

[1 : 52] Because of Christmas, one day they will. Because of Christmas, one day they will. Just look at the world described in verse 6 to 9 of that passage we just read. The wolf will live with the lamb.

The leopard will lie down with the goat. The cow will feed with the bear. And the lion will eat straw like the ox. There will be no more harm. Nothing will be destroyed in this place.

It is a place where everything is good. Everything is right. Everything is peaceful. It's a beautiful picture of a future Isaiah is writing about. And he was alive, wasn't he mentioned just a little bit earlier, hundreds of years before Jesus was born. But he writes about what the world will be like when Jesus does come. And the world is, in a word, peaceful.

It's peaceful. It's got nice music playing gently in the background. It's peaceful. I imagine your home is starting to fill up, well probably has by this point filled up with Christmas cards from various friends and family members that have arrived through the post over the last few days and weeks. Most Christmas cards, don't they, have some kind of message on them?

I'm kind of laughing at myself now. We've got a few at home that look like this. I took this thinking it'd be a good idea as a prop. You probably need to be a foot away from it to actually see it. But we're going to persevere with it nonetheless. This card, it's not the most colorful, but on it it says peace on earth. Peace on earth. I bet those words are familiar to you at Christmas time.

[4 : 04] You've probably heard them before, haven't you? I certainly hope you have because Anne read them for us just a little earlier in the service together. They are some of the famous words of the angel, the angelic beings, as they declare to the heavenly hosts, as they declare to the shepherds, sorry, tending their flocks around Bethlehem, that a king had been born. They say, don't they glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth. Peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests.

Now, they are some of the most famous words, aren't they, in the Christmas story? You probably don't need to have read your Bible to have heard them before in many places. But I wonder if you've ever stopped and thought about what they mean. Why those words?

Why is that what the angels declare? In their eyes, there are two big gifts, aren't there? One for heaven, glory to God, and one for earth. And that was peace.

Peace. Peace. Maybe at home, under your Christmas tree, there's a few presents starting to pile up.

Maybe you've given some of them a good shake to see if you can find out what's inside. We usually have an idea, don't we, of what we hope will be there, or what we are longing to be there by tomorrow morning, if it doesn't seem to be there yet. Maybe you've actually wrote a list of what you're hoping for. If not, you've probably still got lists somewhere in your head, don't you? Kind of games, consoles, and phones tend to be near the top. Socks, quite low down, but we usually get them anyway.

[6 : 05] I wonder where on your list, in your ranking, peace would come in.

It wouldn't surprise me if it wasn't there at all for a lot of us. Who needs peace? Some places in the world really need peace, don't they? I think we can all agree on that.

But us, here, now, do we really need peace? Well, the Bible certainly thinks so.

Because on our own, while we might not be at war, like we so often think of war, we certainly are not at peace, because a lack of peace is really at its root, isn't it? It's what we experience when relationships are broken.

A lack of peace is what we experience when relationships are broken. War is what happens, isn't it, when those relationships break on national scales?

[7 : 20] But the root is still the same. Just think back to the last time you fell out with someone. It's maybe not the cheeriest subject on the morning of Christmas Eve, but it is worthwhile, I promise.

Maybe it was a friend who said something unkind about you behind your back. Or maybe they found out you said something unkind about them behind their back.

Maybe it was a family member, a brother or a sister really annoyed you, didn't share something with you. Maybe you fell out with one of your parents or one of your children. Maybe you got really frustrated with someone at work who wasn't pulling their weight.

Or maybe someone at work got really frustrated with you for not pulling your weight. There's times in all our lives, isn't there, where relationships with people around us start to break down.

Just think back to any one of those occasions. Did you feel at peace? You didn't, did you?

[8 : 30] When relationships are broken, we lose peace. And the closer we are, or the closer we should be to that person, the greater that loss of peace is, isn't it?

So if you fell out with someone you never really talked to at school or at work, it's sad, isn't it?

But it's nowhere near as bad as if you fall out with your best friend. That gets to you far more, doesn't it? What about when it's a brother or a sister or a mom or a dad or a son or a daughter or a husband or a wife?

How much more does it hurt when those relationships break down? How much deeper is our loss? How much less peace do we have in those moments? Here's the inescapable truth of the Bible, the truth of life.

[9 : 58] The closest relationship every one of us should have is the most broken of all. God did not make you to live life on your own.

God made you to live life with Him. You're supposed to live life in a wonderfully close relationship with God.

God's. But just think, what do the healthy relationships in your life look like? Maybe it's with your parents or a close friend. When relationships are going well, we spend lots of time together, don't we?

We love to do everything with one another. We constantly speak to each other. We tell people about one another. Or we tell one another about all the other people and everything that's going on in our life.

But for many of us, most of the time, that's not the relationship we have with God, is it? It is a broken relationship.

[11 : 22] And wherever there are broken relationships, there is no peace. And it's a broken relationship because we are the ones who've abandoned it.

At the very start of Isaiah, in chapter 1, you can go there if you want, it's just verse 2 of chapter 1.

God says to His people, I loved you as my own children.

He's talking about the relationship He had with them. I loved you as my own. But you chose to rebel against me.

You wandered astray. You broke off the relationship. In 1908, that was a long time ago, I know, but in 1908, the Times newspaper asked a number of renowned writers and thinkers to submit a response to the simple but profound question, what is wrong with the world?

What is wrong with the world? How would you answer that question, wanderer? War, famine, global warming, incurable diseases, poverty, greed, injustice, injustice, there seems no end of options, does there?

[12:53] One of the people, the Times, asked to respond to their question was a man called G.K. Chesterton. And G.K. Chesterton was a well-known Christian author of the time, and his response was the shortest of all the answers they received.

So I'm going to read to you the full thing, because there is wisdom, I think, in every word that he wrote. What is wrong with the world?

G.K. Chesterton replied, Dear Sirs, I am. When we think what's wrong with the world, our temptation always, isn't it, is to start pointing outwards.

There's a problem over there, there's a problem in that country, there's a problem with these people. But Chesterton understood something we would all do well to understand.

Our relationship with God is the foundation from which all of our other relationships are built. It is the cornerstone on which everything else stands.

[14:17] And if the world is broken, and I think we can agree the world is broken, isn't it? If the world is broken, it's because at the root of the matter, the heart of the problem is that people's relationship with God is broken.

And if people's relationship with God is broken, that's not because of anything out there, it's because of something in here. If you want to know where the problems of this world begin, we need to start by looking at ourselves.

And we will find that the world would not be a peaceful place even if the only person in it was me. Maybe this morning you know you're not at peace, but you don't know why.

Maybe you've tried all sorts of things to make yourself feel better, but nothing seems to have worked. That story sounds familiar.

Now, let me say, Christmas is very, very good news for you. Because, as the angels declared, while we on our own are in a myriad of broken relationships, when Jesus came, peace came.

[15:55] Peace on earth. With the birth of Jesus, peace comes for those on whom his favor rests.

peace. Because, while we have broken the most important relationship of all, Jesus has come to restore it.

Just two things to remember about the birth of Jesus as we look forward to Christmas tomorrow.

Firstly, Jesus came to fix the most broken relationship of all.

There's about two million people across the world who are going to celebrate Christmas tomorrow. I'm willing to guess that's more than the biggest birthday party any of us have been to.

There's a reason we celebrate Jesus' birthday like no one else's, isn't there? Because Jesus was like no one else.

[17:00] We get a glimpse of that in Isaiah 11, right the way through Isaiah. There's so much that he says about this. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him. The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.

He is righteous and just. He is kind and compassionate. Why? How? Just a few chapters earlier we get the wonderful news that this child will be called Emmanuel, which means God's with us.

Jesus was a man, he would have been a normal baby. If he went to creche, he wouldn't be able to tell apart from any of the other babies. All babies look the same, don't they? even though there

would have been nothing special about the way he looked, this baby was God's becoming human. It is the greatest mystery, something that should blow and boggle our minds. history suggests,

doesn't it, that there was quite obviously something very different about who Jesus was.

There's a reason two billion people are celebrating his birth tomorrow. Jesus was God and man.

[18:42] And what that means is that he came to bring together what we had rent asunder. That relationship that we had broken between us and God.

Jesus comes as us and God and pulls them back together. The relationship is restored. And so the angels declare peace on earth.

God is listening to what Paul says in the Colossians about Jesus. He says, God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God, spread apart, you were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior, but now, but now, because of Christmas, he has reconciled you.

He has restored that relationship through his death to present you wholly in his sight without blemish and free from accusation if you continue in your faith.

[20 : 15] Remember that Jesus came to restore the most important and most broken relationship of all, but rejoice also that the restoration doesn't end there.

I wonder if you noticed what was happening at the start of Isaiah 11. Look at how Jesus' coming is described there. says, a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse.

It's a shoot, it's the beginning of something. When you plant something in the garden and a shoot sprouts out the ground, it's a good sign, isn't it?

It's a great sign. It's a sign of life. But, assuming you're a better gardener than I, that's not the end of it, is it? The shoot comes, but it grows, and it grows, and it grows.

So it is with the peace that Jesus brings. When He came 2,000 years ago, when He was born and died on the cross for our sins, He healed the deepest divide of all.

[21 : 34] But, like a deep wound, I don't know if you've ever had a really bad cut, once the deepest part has healed, what happens?

Everything else starts coming together, doesn't it? Once the deepest part is healed, healing comes to every part above it.

you can hopefully begin to see that right here in church, because it is amongst His people that Jesus heals more and more broken relationships.

It doesn't mean people in church never fall out, but it does mean that when we do, we treat each other like Jesus has treated us, and we forgive each other, and we want to love and care for each other, and so the divides that would be deep if they happened apart from Him, all of a sudden, they start coming back together.

The greatest hope of the gospel is that we are made right with God, but its promises do not end there. Just look again at those last few verses that we read in Isaiah 11.

[22 : 57] The picture it paints can seem almost far-fetched, can't it? Will a lion really live with a lamb?

Will a cow feed with a bear? Can a young child really put their hand in the viper's nest? The very simple answer the Bible gives us is yes.

one day, yes. It seems like a world so far away, doesn't it, from the one we know? But it takes us right back to the beginning of the Bible, to a time when there was no sin, when there were no broken relationships.

What we read here in Isaiah 11 is the promise, the guarantee that that's where Jesus is taking us back to. Growing is a slow process, isn't it?

And so, these things take time and it might feel like the pace is glacial at points, peace. But peace is coming because peace has come.

[24 : 26] Jesus has restored the relationship between God and man for all those who put their faith in him. And because he has done that, the promise he guarantees to all his people is that there will one day, very soon be a time when there will never again be anything broken, when there will forever be peace on earth.

Every painful moment you have experienced this last year, every moment of hurt, every time you wished that the world were different.

Jesus is coming to make it so. He has come once to sew together the deepest divide of all. But each and every day we live for and with him.

And each and every day we look forward to the future he has promised us. We get a day closer to a world where peace will reign forever.

That is the hope we hold on to. Knowing that we are right with God and one day we will be right forever with everything. Because where there is no broken relationships there is everlasting peace.

[26 : 01] That is why the angels declare on the night that Jesus was born peace on earth. It is a peace that every one of us desperately needs and desperately wants.

And it is a peace every one of us can know if we love and follow him. Let us pray before we sing our final hymn together.

Father, we thank you so much for your son Jesus Christ. We thank you that with his coming peace came to earth.

We thank you that in Jesus our relationship with you can be made right once more. And we thank you for the wonderful hope that in him every relationship will be made right in the future.

as we long for that day as we look forward to that day we pray that you would help us to continue to hold fast to him and his promises. And it's in his wonderful name that we pray.
[27:13] Amen.