

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests. Amen.

It happened one hundred eight years ago today, five months into the Great War. Along Europe's Western Front, the British were entrenched on one side, the Germans on the other, and nearly two million people had died. But on December 24, 1914, right smack dab in the middle of the bloodiest war that the world that ever seen, peace broke out.

It started when some Germans lifted makeshift Christmas trees over their trenches and sang *Silent Night*. Soon the British joined in, and eventually one man cautiously left his trench, then another, then another, and for the next twenty-four hours, enemies were friends. They joked, they smoked, they played soccer.

It was Christmas miracle. But it didn't last long. Not only did the singing quickly turn back into shooting, but that shooting carried on for another three and a half years.

How about today? What are the chances that peace spontaneously breaks out on earth right now? Peace between Russia and Ukraine, peace between Muslims and Christians, peace between Democrats and Republicans, peace between you and whoever you're at war with?

If that seems like an impossible long-shot, you should know that God's idea of peace is way bigger, way more impossible, than that. The Biblical concept of peace is more than the absence of fighting. In Hebrew peace is *shalom*, and *shalom* means that everything is in its right place. Everything fits. If your life is a puzzle, then peace means that every single piece of your life is perfectly in place.

What are the odds of getting peace like that? It would take a Christmas miracle, right? But the miracle of Christmas is that God gives you that peace!

Listen to the prophet Micah. Micah lives seven hundred years before Christ, at a time when the people of God view *shalom* the same way Americans view life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They assume that peace is something that they are born with the right to have.

After all, they are the people of the promise – descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They live in the Promised Land. They built the LORD's temple, a symbol of God's promise. They have kings descended from *the* great king, David, and the King of promise will come from him.

But they love those gifts more than the Giver. They don't believe the LORD's promise anymore, and you can't have true peace without that piece of the puzzle. So God sends prophets like Micah to tell them that soon their *shalom* will be shattered.

They will be swept out of the land and taken into exile (Micah 4:10). The temple will be ground down to its foundations (Micah 3:12). King David's family tree will be cut to a stump by the ax of God's judgment (Isaiah 11:1). The LORD will abandon them **(5:3)**, and they have no one to blame but themselves.

Are you any different? This time of year, you receive a Christmas card or three, every day – usually with pictures and letters. And after a while all those pictures blur together, and all those letters sound the same. Everyone is smiling; kids are hugging; parents look put together. And life is good, so good, for them, everything fits together.

But the barrage of Christmas cheer makes you wonder: "Is my life the only one without peace?" It's not. Each of us has struggles, even the people sending the Christmas cards. You have things that stress you out, that frustrate you. Things that make you feel hurt, disappointed, sad, and angry. We all do.

Maybe you're good at convincing people that your life is picture perfect. Maybe you're even better at finding someone to blame when your life isn't. But deep down you know better. If you're like me, in those rare moments of honesty, you realize that everything in life that's not exactly the way that you want it to be, is that way, because of you (Romans 7:19).

Sin wrecks peace (Isaiah 59:2). Experience teaches that God's idea of peace, where everything is in its right place, is hard to come by.

So Micah has to remind us, "Here is the One who will make it happen." Not only does he warn the people that soon their peace will be gone, he also points them ahead to the King who will bring it back.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel" (5:2). This King will be born in Bethlehem. Not in Jerusalem, the capital, *the* City of David (2 Samuel 5:9), but seven miles south, in Bethlehem, David's hometown, way out in the sticks of Ephrathah.

From there will come another son of David, who is also so much more. His **"origins are from of old, from ancient times" (5:2)**, literally "from days of eternity." This King is eternal. He has no beginning and he has no end (Hebrews 13:8).

But he also has human roots. **Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son (5:3).** This King has a mother, but no mention of a father. Here Micah echoes something Isaiah promised: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son" (Isaiah 7:14) – Immanuel, the sign that God is with them and their abandonment is over.

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God (5:4). This King is all-powerful. He does whatever pleases him; nothing is beyond his capability (Psalm 115:3).

So **they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth (5:4).** This King rules, not just tiny, little Judah, but "all the nations" (Revelation 12:5).

Now, if it seems like this King has characteristics that only God has, it is because this King *is* God (Romans 9:5). But, unlike every other king who elevates himself over the people, this King, who created all people, stoops down and becomes one of us (Hebrews 2:14).

So here is the most amazing miracle the world will ever know: she who is in labor is a humble virgin, and in Bethlehem – of all places – she gives birth to the almighty God, who has no beginning, who wrapped himself in human flesh, in her womb, to be the King of all. No wonder "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

But you know what's really amazing about this? The fact that it's so easy for us to believe that this prophecy is about Jesus Christ, Son of God and Mary's Son, but it is so difficult for us to believe the very last thing that Micah writes: **He will be our peace (5:5).**

Not "he will bring peace," not "he will give peace," but he *is* peace. If everything that Micah says about this King is true, if Jesus really is the eternal Son of God come down to earth to live and to die and to rise for you, then your greatest needs have all been met and your deepest desires have all been satisfied.

In Jesus you have the unconditional pardon of everything that you've ever done wrong (Romans 3:24). You are forgiven. When you stand before God, he sees you as absolutely perfect (2 Corinthians 5:21). You have freedom from the condemnation that you deserve (Romans 8:1), and in its place you get a free pass to eternal life (John 11:25).

Jesus is your peace, which means if you have Jesus, you have peace. Do you buy that? Maybe a better question is: Do you understand that?

I would love to tell you that knowing Jesus will solve all your problems. But I can't, because God doesn't promise that (2 Corinthians 12:9). Knowing Jesus does not guarantee that every frustration, every sadness, every hurt, and all the anger will instantly and permanently go away.

But I can promise you this, and you can hold your God to this: **Jesus is your peace**. In Jesus you have absolutely everything that you need, and absolutely everything that you desire: absolute forgiveness and a guaranteed inheritance in heaven, where everything will be in its right place (Revelation 21:3-5).

And if all of that can be exactly right, can anything in your life be all that wrong? Jesus is more than just one piece that needs to be in just the right place in your life. He's more than the first piece, and not just the most important piece. No, when it comes to *shalom*, when it comes to this perfect, lasting peace, Jesus is the only piece of the puzzle that really matters. And he is the gift that God wraps up and gives to you today. Merry Christmas. Amen.