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Advent – The Announcement

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Luke 2:14

It was, by far, the most important event ever, accompanied by the most important song ever, that contained the most important announcement ever. I want to get you to think with me about this very, very familiar, one sentence hymn that is found in Luke 2:14, page 857, in your church Bibles, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased."

Luella and I live at the edge of Chinatown, and so to get up to this part of Center City during the cold, I always cut through Macy's. Once Wanamakers (Philadelphia Christmas Light Show), I've seen the light show 722 times, already this year. And as I was coursing through Macy's, I heard playing in the background, "Glory to God in the Highest," those words by music, and I thought what a juxtaposition! Here we're all racing; we're all pushing one another to get the best view of the lights. How many people have any clue whatsoever what these words mean?

I wonder if we do. There's something about familiarity that puts our brains and our hearts into a sort of mental, spiritual, monotone. We quit thinking; we quit hearing; we quit questioning; we quit considering. I am persuaded that these words, the deep expansive content of the words of this little hymn, are often misunderstood.

Yes, this is a hymn of celebration of that baby's birth, the Messiah that was promised. But these words also, in a very clear way, define your need and mine. And in defining our need, they define the mission of that baby in the manger.

And if they define our need, and they define His mission, then hear what I am about to say, these words not only announce a birth, they predict a death! These words really do capture our need. 'Glory' and 'peace' are the two principal words of this little hymn, "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased."

I don't know if you've noticed this in yourself, but you are glory focused. You are glory attentive. You're glory seeking. You're a bit glory obsessed. Everything you do in your life, everything you say, every choice you make, every reaction in relationships is done in pursuit of some kind of glory. You say, "Paul, I don't understand what you mean." Well, let's take the Biblical tour.

You were created to live with the glory of God in view. You were created so that the principal motivation in your life would be that God would be praised. That God would be pleased. You were created to live in the most practical sense of what these words mean, a God-ward existence, an upward-focused existence...that you could really argue that God would be the reason that you do all that you do.

We know that creation was designed to remind us of, to point us to the glory of God. That everything that was created is meant to be a finger that points us to the person and the character, the plan of God, that we would be reminded again and again, everywhere we look that God is, and God must be the center of our existence.

Whether it is frigid cold and snow that you don't want to yet face, or the beautiful song of a bird, or the shocking bright colors of the fall leaves, or a scary storm, or the touch of another human being's hand, or the tone of their voice, the brightness of the morning, the darkness of the night, all of those things, all of those glories are shadow glories that are meant to reflect the one glory that's truly glorious-the glory of God.

That's the way it was meant to happen, but in a sad moment of disobedience and rebellion, Adam and Eve chose rather to live for the glory of the creation than the glory of God. They wanted something in the creation more than they wanted God, and ever since that horrible moment, there has been, in all of our hearts, glory confusion and a glory war. We don't always live for the glory of God. There are other glories that can compete in our heart for this one glory.

You were sitting in traffic this week. I don't think you probably thought first of the glory of God. You didn't think that this traffic is a reminder, a somber reminder that the Lord is in control. Praise His name--I'm not! I don't think that's what you thought. Very often we forget God's glory, and we live for other glories; in fact, you could argue that every sin has, at its root, an exchange of God's glory for some glory in creation.

What is lust about? Lust would exchange the glory of God for the glory of momentary sexual pleasure. Materialism replaces the glory of God with the possession of physical things. Pride chooses to live more for self-glory than the glory of God. We're all glory confused; we're all in some way glory thieves.

And if you reflect on your world this week, you probably wouldn't be able to say in every way possible, "I lived with the glory of God in view this week." You probably couldn't say that. There are times when other shadow glories become more precious to you, and you convince yourself that you can't live without them, and your life is more dictated by the worship of what was created than the worship of the Creator.

And listen, that never leads to a heart that's at rest; it never leads to inner peace; it never leads to satisfaction because the shadow glories can't fulfill your heart. They weren't designed to do that. You can't turn the created world into your own personal messiah; it will never work. We have a glory problem. All of us are still, yet, in the midst

of a glory war. We all have moments of glory confusion. We all have times where we want the creation more than we want the Creator.

‘Glory to God in the highest!’ Imagine what the world would be like if every person lived that way. Imagine what it would be like to live in a world where every heart of every human being was ruled by the glory of God. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. You see, we’re not talking here first about a spiritual thing or about a religious thing.

This is the way God designed all human beings to live; all human beings were called, were chosen, were created to live for the glory of God. That's humanness. That was the creation plan. And then, in a moment of self-glory and rebellion, that was shattered, and all of us live in the middle of glory war and glory confusion as a result.

The second word is that word ‘peace.’ Peace among those with whom He is pleased. You and I were created for peace with God. We were created so that the most important thing in our lives would be relationship with God. We were created to have the high honor of being the worshipful, obedient, friends of God. That friendship with God would be the most meaningful reality of our lives.

And that peace with God would allow us to have peace within; not peace because we’re strong, not peace because we’re wise, not peace because we know what's happening next, but peace because we have this relationship with the One who rules it all, and who guides us by His hand, and so because of our relationship with God, even though we don't know all that we need to know, and we can't predict the next day, we have peace in our hearts-rest. When that shalom with God is shattered, then, the result is that our hearts are not at rest.

There is a horrible moment in the garden where God comes down in the cool of the day to commune with Adam and Eve; it's a beautiful picture that far. These are the friends of God that He would walk with them and commune with them; what a beautiful thing. Yet, Adam and Eve aren't running to meet Him. They're not excited to see Him. No! They're hiding in guilt and fear because they have been disobedient, and that peace with God has been shattered.

I love that Old Testament word ‘shalom’ because it pictures something more fundamental than just the absence of conflict. It pictures that all things are in their proper order, are working the way they were designed to work; peace with God means I have peace inside. But we don't always have that. All of us have the experience of anxiety, sometimes anxiety that we can't escape, or anger or frustration or discouragement or depression or hopelessness; our hearts struggle to find rest.

Have you had any sleepless nights recently where your mind went over that endless catalog of ‘what ifs’? Where halfway in and out of sleep, you wished you were sovereign. Peace with God; peace within.

The third thing that we were created for is peace with others. You see, when I don't have peace with God, and I don't have peace inside of myself, it makes it very hard for me to live at peace with others, and our lives are marked by conflict. I don't think anyone in this room has lived a conflict free 2010, probably not last month, probably not last week, free of any moment of irritation or impatience or anger. Yesterday, anyone? This morning?

It's amazing that all around us is unrest, all around us is conflict; we have a peace problem. Brokenness with God leads to brokenness within, leads to brokenness in the community that's around us. This song really does capture the great human dilemma. Glory thieves! Shalom shattered, and in defining our need, this little hymn really points us to the mission of the Messiah.

Listen! You know this; Jesus didn't come first on a political mission to establish an earthly kingdom. He didn't come on an educational mission just to correct our worldview. Jesus didn't come on a psychological mission just to make sure that we felt okay. Jesus, in fact, didn't come on a religious mission to make sure that you did external, religiously appropriate things. No, Jesus's mission is much more radical than that and much more fundamental than that, and if you don't understand that, you misunderstand His mission.

If I have a glory problem, and if I have a peace problem, then, what I have is a heart problem. My problem isn't so much my relationships; my problem isn't so much my situation. My problem is something broken in my heart. David gets it right when he prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." That's what we need: radical, personal, long-term, heart-change, because that's our problem.

The prophecies of the coming Christ are very clear that He is coming to address that problem. "I will give them a new heart. I will take that heart of stone out of them, and I will replace it with a heart of flesh." That's His work--that this stony heart, resistant to change, would become a heart alive by God's work and now able to change. And that people, who once lived for their own glory, would now, by His grace, live for His glory. Oh, not just in religious matters, but in every day in their lives that these people, in their words and their thoughts and their actions and their relationships and their desires, would live for the glory of God!

Where the rubber meets the road in everyday life, that there would be something that would motivate me, that would be bigger than what I want, and bigger than what I think I need, and bigger than my pleasure of the moment, that I would really have a heart that had been captivated by the glory of God--that is the mission of Jesus! And that I would be brought, quite apart from what I would be able to do, I would be brought by grace into peace with God.

Listen! It is not okay that masses and masses of human beings do not live in peace with God. It's not okay that the people who walk those streets live apart from peace with God.

It's not okay that masses of people in the United States couldn't care less about peace with God. It's not okay that, in the nations around the world, masses of people live with no knowledge of what it means to live in peace with God. It's not okay! It's not okay! It's not okay! It's not okay because the epicenter of the human existence would be a relationship with God.

Listen, as you walk the streets, and you realize most people don't understand this, it ought to break your heart; it ought to make you weep; we must not become comfortable with this because, if it were okay for us to live in broken relationship with God, Jesus wouldn't have come. Yes, I am passionate about this; this is important.

What a tragedy that I would wake up and my whole life would be lived for teeny little glories that never satisfy me. What a tragedy that I wouldn't care about peace with God. Those things are not okay. So Jesus came because my only hope would be His grace. I can't escape my heart. I can move to another location. I can get out of a relationship, but the one thing I can't escape is the condition of my heart.

My problem is me! And so a Lord and Savior must come. And you hear the word 'Savior,' know what you're hearing, you don't need a Savior unless you are unable to help yourself—'Savior' tells you, you need to be rescued. These words really do define our need. They really do define Christ's mission.

But there's another thing they do; they define for us the price of this mission. It's really captured in that final phrase, "...peace among those with whom He is pleased," maybe better translated peace on whom His favor is placed, maybe even better, peace to those to whom His grace is given.

You see, the only hope of peace is grace, and the vehicle of grace is a death. You see, that stolen glory and that shattered peace left us all guilty, because rather than living for God, we have sought to be God; rather than honoring the Creator, we have worshiped the creation, and the sentence of that guilt is death. You do not understand that baby in the manger unless you know that that baby came to be a Lamb.

Here is the plan, He would come, and from day one, all of His thoughts and all of His desires, all His actions, reactions and responses would be fully and completely and perfectly lived to the glory of God. He, on our behalf, would live for our glory; He would live the life that we could not live. And on the cross, He would bear our penalty, and He would face the rejection of the Father so that we could know His acceptance and peace with Him. Upward peace that would create inward peace that would give us the ability to have outward peace; that was the plan.

He came willingly; He came knowledgeable. He knew what the price would be. He must die so that we would live, so that raised out of human beings who live for their own glory, raised out of human beings who don't care for peace with God would be a company of people who growingly are captivated by the glory of God who love the fact that they have

peace with God; “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace with whom He is pleased!”

If, as I have been talking this morning, you have been thinking personally; if you have, and if you would for a moment, reflect on your last couple weeks, you will recognize, brothers and sisters, that you and I still have a glory problem. We don't always get glory right. Recognize that we have a peace problem; we don't always care about peace with God. We don't always have peace within. We surely don't always experience peace with one another.

And so the work of that grace is as needed by us this morning as it's ever been. The angels announce your hope. The angels announce your redemption. The angels announce to you grace; grace of a life lived, grace of a death offered so that you may live for His glory, and you may experience in all the ways possible, His peace. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests!”

Let's Pray: We would say this morning, Father, who is a God like our God? Who has mercy rich and free like our God? Because our deepest dilemma in life is our glory seeking hearts. We cannot rescue ourselves. We're only rescued by the grace of Your cross. We thank You that the angels announced the birth of a willing Savior who knew what He was facing, who knew what He must do, and who did it with joy...so that our hearts, once again, would be released from slavery to the shadow glories of creation to live for Your glory, and so that that shattered shalom would be restored once again; peace with You, rest within, in a community of love that is Your people. Thank you, in Jesus name, Amen.
