

The Hopes and Fears of All the Years

by Chuck LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

There is a Christmas carol called, "O Little Town Of Bethlehem." The first verse is as follows:

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

The birth of Jesus Christ has brought to light the hopes and fears of all the years. When Jesus Christ was presented in the temple as a baby, an aged and godly man named Simeon prophesied that Jesus Christ was destined for the fall and rising of many, and that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed through him (Luke 2:34-35).

Through Jesus Christ, God is redeeming and saving and exalting mankind. And through Jesus Christ, God is also judging the world. The prophet Isaiah knew this.

Isaiah 9:6-7 (All scripture in NKJV):

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

In a prophecy concerning the Messiah, Isaiah declares that he will govern and judge and that he will be known among other things as the "Prince of

Peace." What a wonderful message we bring when we preach Christ, we speak of peace. The shepherds near Bethlehem heard of this peace too on the night that Jesus was born.

Luke 2:8-14

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

"And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Peace! Goodwill towards men! What a wonderful proclamation. Our hopes for joy, and life, and love and for peace, can now all be fulfilled through Jesus Christ. The word for "peace" here in Luke means a blessed wholeness. It is a peace that gives one a sense of total well being. This peace comes only to those who accept God's goodwill in Christ.

But not only are the world's hopes met in Jesus Christ, so are its greatest fears. The entrance of Jesus Christ into the world not only made peace available, it also brought a sword.

Matthew 10:32-34

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

"But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.

The religious and sentimental view of Jesus Christ is that he came to fling peace around indiscriminately. Like fairy dust, a little sprinkle from the Savior and some happy and positive thoughts, and all will be well. But this is not true. This is a lie. We think of Jesus Christ as meek and mild, and he is to those who submit to his Lordship. But the Bible is clear that every knee shall bow before the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:8-11

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

*that at the name of Jesus **every knee should bow**, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,*

and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father [my emphasis].

Every knee shall bow before Christ, some in loving submission, some from force. The Scriptures not only show us a Christ who is gentle and who loves for children to sit on his lap, it also shows us a Christ who can be hot with anger, and who with whip in hand can drive the money changers from the temple!

The coming of Jesus Christ was not only to bring peace, but also judgment. People talk about the wonderful grace of God, but grace does not come cheap. The salvation we can receive comes through the cross of Christ. Our salvation cost God the death of His Son. We are saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the grace of God. But conversely, rejection of the Savior renders a devastating verdict of condemnation.

Coming face to face with Jesus Christ can be a disturbing experience. Seeing him, you are confronted with the truth that without him you are doomed. Seeing him, we realize that none of our works can save us. Our only hope is in him. But many are too proud and arrogant to accept this verdict.

Matthew 11:20-24

Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent:

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

"but I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

"And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

"But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

The final judgment of condemnation is not for sin, but for the rejection of the Savior from sin, the Lord Jesus Christ. The people in these cities had seen Jesus Christ work, they had heard him preach God's Word, but they rejected him. They rejected God's goodwill that would have brought them peace.

I want you to notice in verse 23 the word "Hades." This word is also translated as hell. The world has many ideas about hell from a place of fire and brimstone, to a place where we relive all our sins throughout all eternity. But biblically hell - Hades, is used for the state of death.¹ It is the realm

¹Editor's note: as the author states the Greek word "Hades" refers to the realm of non-existence in the grave. Another Greek word "gehenna," also translated "hell," refers to the "second death" or the place of final "destruction" of the ungodly after the final judgment.

of the grave, **it is life extinguished**, non-existence. Do you know that the word "hell" or "Hades" is mentioned on more pages of the Bible than the word heaven itself? I came across this quote concerning what someone has said about hell.

The idea of hell was born of revenge and brutality on the one side, and cowardice on the other ... I have no respect for any human being who believes in it ... I dislike the doctrine, I hate it, I despise it, I defy this doctrine ...¹

The person who said this was Robert Ingersoll, one of the last century's great American philosophers and a foremost opponent of Christ and Christianity. Robert Ingersoll is dead and Robert Ingersoll has inherited hell [Hades]. He may have railed against it, rebelled against it, marched against it, protested against it, but he is in it. His life is extinguished and his future is simply total annihilation.

People today dislike the doctrine of hell, of eternal death, of judgment. But unless one accepts the Lord Jesus Christ, hell stands like a monolithic stone over the head of every living person. God does not delight in the death of wicked (Ezekial 18). He delights in showing mercy. In a sense God does not condemn people to extinction. People sentence themselves by their rejection of the Savior. As certain as is the love and mercy of God, so is the day of judgment.

Acts 10:34-43

*Then Peter opened his mouth and said:
"In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.*

"But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

"The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ - He is Lord of all,

"that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:

¹As quoted in *Hell You Say*, (Timothy Books, Newton, Pa., 1974), p. 7.

"how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

"And we are witnesses of all things which He did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

"Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly,

"not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

*"And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that **it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.***

"To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" [my emphasis].

Peter proclaimed as a part of the message about Christ, a day of judgment, a time when Christ will judge the living and the dead. No one will escape!

The apostle Paul proclaimed this same message of judgment, when he preached in Athens before the intellectual elite of that city.

Acts 17:22-31

Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;

for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:

"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

"Nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

"so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us

"for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are his offspring.'

"Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

"because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" [my emphasis].

Life is not haphazard. It has a beginning and it will have an end. There are two destinies that await the choice of every man and woman. There comes a time when every man and woman needs to held face to face with the ultimate reality of the future. Like Scrooge, with the "Spirit of Christmas Future," people need to see what might be. But unlike Scrooge and his ghost, this is no work of fiction.

Romans 2:16 states that there is a day coming when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. So many people today do not like to hear this kind of preaching and teaching. They think it to be old fashioned, unloving and unkind. They say, "Life is tough. Give me something that will help us now." The Scriptures do provide help for the here and now. But what many people really want is a

kind of spiritual morphine. If a doctor says you have a cancerous growth and it has to be cut out, is he unkind? If what the Scriptures say are true, and I believe they are, then to speak the truth about judgment is the most loving thing in the world. Wouldn't you want to be informed if you were in danger? Sure!

Our world does not like preaching on judgment because our world is sinful and selfish. We are too often like children who have been warned time and time again not to do a certain thing. Then when we are caught and we receive the consequences of our actions we think our parents are cruel. Children seldom if ever think of the great love the parent has in warning the child in the first place.

God is a God of love and justice. He does not just pronounce a judgment of condemnation. He says, "Look, here is where you are , you are doomed, but here is a way of escape." He says, "I have set before you life and death - choose life!" And we can choose life when we accept Christ. This will bring us peace.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

We can have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. We can have the peace of reconciliation, of being one with God. We can have the peace of a cleared conscience, the peace of inner tranquillity that comes from knowing that you are God's child. We can have peace from the mental anguish that comes with the harsh realities of life.

Philippians 4:6-7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

John 16:33

"These things I [Jesus Christ] have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have

tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The world will always be a whirlwind of confusion and turmoil as it rushes headlong to its final judgment. But for those who accept Christ there can be true peace. Jesus Christ has made peace a reality.

Colossians 1:19-20

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,

and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of the cross.

Peace in life comes through the cross of Jesus Christ. In him we are reconciled to God. The word "reconcile" in this verse means to cause a thorough change. Where there was no trust, there now is. Where there was no peace, there is now peace!

What the world offers as peace is only a temporary cessation of active war. But in the heart, war and fear still rage. The peace the world offers is no more satisfying than a cup of sand offered to a man dying of thirst. We all know in the depths of our hearts that politics, education, science, the arts, even religion leave us unfulfilled. Without Christ all these things are hollow and unsatisfying.

The heart hungers for something grand and noble and pure. The heart hungers for that which is good and satisfying. The heart hungers for peace and rest. But it is only found in Christ.

Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and My burden is light."

This is not the peace and rest of inactivity. It is the rest of knowing that you are bound for an eternity of glory with God. It is the rest of a heart, that is in harmony with God's will. It is the rest of knowing and experiencing the full blessing of God. It is total satisfaction. It is eternal life.

John 6:35-40

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

"But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

When Jesus Christ was born in the town of Bethlehem almost 2000 years ago the hopes and fears of all the years came together in that manger where he lay.

There is another Christmas carol entitled "O Holy Night." The first verse reads:

O holy night the stars are brightly shining, it is the night of the dear Savior's birth;

Long lay the world in sin and error pinning, 'til he appeared and the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;

For those who accept the salvation offered in Jesus Christ, the soul does for the first time feel its worth! We realize that we are saved from sin and its consequences, and that we are also saved to bear the image of God. And our hearts thrill with hope, knowing that each new day we can manifest the life and power of God, and each new day brings us closer to history's final moments.

2 Peter 4:11-13

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

To those who accept the Lord Jesus Christ the future is as bright as the promise of God. For those who accept Christ as Lord and Savior there is peace and rest even in the here and now. And we look forward with great expectation to a new earth, a new world, where there will be no more sorrow and tears.

People speak of making their peace with God. But there is no peace with God except that which comes through the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed are those who have Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior.

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