

Adventure: Conflict to Peace

Icebreaker: What do you do for stress relief?

Background:

Despite what the Christmas cards depict, Bethlehem was not calm and bright. When Jesus was born, Israel – had a pretty bad run of it. Israel was conquered by the Babylonian Empire, which was subsequently conquered by the Persian Empire. Persian Empire and the Romans went to war, and Rome won. Rome then had possession of Israel. The Romans mercilessly dominated their empires for 500 years!

The Roman empire was a military machine. Their soldiers had carte blanche to take from the inhabitants. Rome set up a little “mock” local government with power-hungry men to rule the “local franchise.”

The Christmas narrative in Luke 2 begins: “In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went to their own town to register.” (Luke 2:1-3)

Roman taxes were terrible. Joseph & pregnant Mary weren’t headed to Bethlehem to see family but for the census. Why a census you ask? To ensure Rome is getting taxes. And if you couldn’t pay your taxes, Roman soldiers could burn down your house, maybe take your kids as slaves or take your land. The time of Jesus was far from calm and bright. It was full of conflicts. – Pastor Brian Werner

Our discussion will be about attaining peace in the midst of conflicts.

Luke 2:1-14 *In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to*

register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

1. In Esther 4:14, there is a noteworthy statement, "born for such a time as this." If you can add more to the above background, what was the "time" Jesus was born into?

2. What might the atmosphere of Israel countryside have been like when Joseph and Mary went back to Bethlehem to register for the census?

3. How is our chaotic and conflicting time similar to Jesus' time?

Greek word rendered as Peace (eiréné)- (from *eirō*, “to join, tie together into a whole”) – properly, *wholeness*, i.e. when all essential parts are joined together; *peace* (God’s gift of *wholeness*). – HELP Word Studies, Discovery Bible

4. How is the contemporary view of peace different from the Greek/Hebrew view?

5. As the angel and the heavenly host praised God and announced peace on earth to those on whom His favor rests, what is broken that God wants to make whole? (Romans 5:19, 6:23)

Romans 5:19 *For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

6. Who will find this peace? (Luke 2:14, Romans 5:1)

Romans 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*

7. In what circumstances did you receive this peace?

8. From whom and how can we find this peace? (John 14:27, Matthew 6:33-34, Romans 14:17, Galatians 5:22)

John 14:27 *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

Matthew 6:33-34 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Romans 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*

Galatians 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

9. Why do we Christians sometimes not find peace? (James 4:1-3)

James 4:1-3 *1What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

10. What can this peace in us overcome? (John 16:33)

John 16:33 *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

11. How can this peace be a defensive weapon in facing conflicts in this world?

Philippians 4:7 *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

12. How has this peace of God been guarding (keep watching) you from your conflicts? Reference John 14:27 above

13. How can we maintain the peace with God daily? (Romans 8:6)

Romans 8:6 *The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.*