

Recapturing Shalom

Luke 1:26-35

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A year ago, would you ever have imagined that the world would be as it is this Christmas? Masks. Restrictions. Sickness. Fear. Financial crisis. And still so many unanswered questions. Do you ever have those moments where you look around and sense, deep inside, that “Life is not supposed to be like this”?

It wasn't always like this. In the beginning God created our world and everything about it was good. It was Shalom. Not just Shalom meaning peace. It was true and complete Shalom. It was life as it was intended to be. There was no shame, no guilt, no fear and no hate. Everything was right. Right with nature, right with each other, and right with God. Shalom.

But then, in Genesis 3, it happened. Adam, Eve, a tree, a serpent, a lie, and the sinful bite of forbidden fruit that changed the world forever. From then on, pain, doubt, anger, betrayal, sin and death became part of the human experience. Their guilt and the judgment of God, that Adam and Eve had brought upon themselves, would now be passed on to every human who would be born after them. Because of their sin, they were driven out of the Garden of Eden and Shalom was lost. Shalom was lost for all of us.

As the Apostle Paul wrote, *“sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”* (Romans 5:12). *“Like the rest, we were (now) by nature children of wrath . . . fulfilling the cravings of our flesh and indulging its desires and thoughts”* (Ephesians 2:3).

We all are now born with this sinful nature. As scripture declares, *“We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one”* (Romans 3:10-12). We are slaves to sin (Romans 6:17), dead in . . . sin (Ephesians 2:1). We are blind (1 John 2:11), and evil (Luke 11:13). Without Christ we are aliens and strangers, without hope, and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). Our minds are darkened and futile (Ephesians 4:18; Romans 1:21). Our hearts are hardened and deceitful (Ephesians 4:18; Jeremiah 17:9). Our wills refuse to submit to His voice (Jeremiah 9:6; John 5:39-40). All of this is rooted in the sinful

nature that we each inherited from Adam and from which we cannot free ourselves. As long as we live in this fallen condition we will never know the Shalom of God. This darkness is not only over our lives, it hangs over all of creation.

Roman 8 states that, ***“creation was subjected to futility . . . The whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now”*** (Romans 8:20,22).

When we look at our world we know that creation is groaning, longing to be delivered. Crying out for the Shalom of God to return. The news talks of global warming, corruption, violence and immorality. We read of Nigerian children being kidnapped. We hear of thousands of Christians enslaved in Pakistan. We read of abortions, legalized euthanasia, greed, pride and prejudice. We hear of greater weapons and greater poverty. We see the virus and all its side effects that wreak havoc on our society. Romans 8:20-21 tells us that, ***“Creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”***

The fallenness of our world is a consequence of our sin, but also a tool to drive us towards repentance.

If we start back at Genesis 3 and Adam and Eve’s first sin, we see that the whole rest of the Bible is God’s plan to Recapture Shalom. That people would one day be made right with God and with each other.

The years passed by, the sin increased, the world continued to stumble in darkness, but throughout history God began to bring about a plan that would once again reconcile mankind to Himself. For centuries God worked. Through the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Through the lives of Moses, Joshua and the judges. Through the lives of Samuel, Saul, David and Solomon. Through Isaiah, Jeremiah and all the prophets. Through the exile, Daniel, Esther and Nehemiah. Even through the 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testament.

Finally, when everything was ready (Galatians 4:4), God sent an angel to a young girl named Mary. Luke 1 describes the encounter with these words:

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

It was such a strange way to save the world. An angel, sent to a young peasant girl, was hard enough to believe, but Mary becoming pregnant as a virgin has caused many people to walk away from Christianity in doubt. Was Mary, being a virgin, really necessary, or was it God just showing how great He is?

It was a fulfillment of a centuries-old prophecy. Isaiah 7:14 declared: ***“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”***

For us to be freed from our sinful nature and to reclaim Shalom, Jesus had to become human by being born to a woman (Galatians 4:4).

Hebrews 2:14-17 explains it this way: ***“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”***

The high priest was chosen from the people and represented the people before God. For Jesus to be our high priest and to be able to represent us before God, He had to become one of us. As we read in John 1:14, ***“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”*** Philippians 2:6-7 goes on to say, ***“Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”***

Jesus had to be born of a woman and become human. In this way He would associate Himself with the guilty, to be able to represent us before God and pay for our sins. The problem with that was that just as the sacrificial lambs in the temple had to be healthy and unblemished, so, too, Christ must be holy and sinless if He was to be the sacrifice that would pay for our sins.

If Jesus were to be human, would He not also receive the sinful nature that has been passed down through every generation since Adam? If He were the offspring of a man and a woman, Jesus would have received this sinful nature, but God had other plans. As we see in the passage in Luke 1:34-35.

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It was the perfect solution. Jesus would become man so that He could empathize with us and die in our place as one of us. At the same time, His holiness would be preserved as the Holy Spirit would come upon Mary causing her to conceive the Christ child. In this way, Jesus would not receive the sinful nature that originated from Adam.

The Son of God wrapped His divinity in the likeness of man and became a human so that we could be saved.

Our sin was against an infinite God, so only an infinite sacrifice could pay for our sin. But none of us could be the sinless, unblemished, infinite, “sacrificial lamb” that was required.

If none of us could pay the price for our sins, then how can we be saved? By One coming who was fully God and fully man. One who was holy in the Spirit and present in the flesh. One who was tempted in every way, yet was without sin. One who inherited no sin nature from Adam, but instead possessed the holy nature of God. How would this be possible? Through the virgin birth.

And so it was. The eternal Jesus, the Creator of the world, the Son of God, took on the form of a newborn baby. Mary conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because God was His “Father”, the child was divine and did not receive the sin nature that He would have received if Joseph had been His biological father. Because Mary was the mother, the child would be fully human, living in the flesh.

His divine nature made Him fit for the work of Redeemer; His human body allowed Him to shed the blood that was required for the forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22).

Because of this we can recapture Shalom. The way has been opened. All who will turn from their sin and believe in Jesus Christ are reconciled to God. We are finally free from our sin nature and the guilt and judgment it brings on our lives.

Romans 5:18 describes it like this: ***“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”***

Because of Adam's sin, they were forced out of the garden of Eden and Shalom was lost. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are brought back into the presence of God and Shalom is restored.

We have a new identity. The darkness is driven back and the light returns. We are no longer locked out. We receive a new nature. We are born again. We now have the opportunity to walk in holiness and be freed from sin. We are no longer enemies of God, but are now beloved children of God.

We no longer have to hide from God because of our guilt. We can now come before the throne of grace with confidence and receive grace and mercy in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). In us He sees the righteousness of Christ. Since all of our needs are met in Him, we are finally free to selflessly love others as He has loved us.

In Christ, Shalom was restored, is being restored and will be restored. It is another example of the “now” and the “not yet”. In Christ we have been made new and Shalom is restored in us. At the same time, day by day, we are learning how to live in the midst of our new, restored Shalom. As we submit to the Holy Spirit, study God's Word, draw near to God in prayer, and fellowship with God's people, we will be drawn more fully into the Shalom that God intends for us as believers. Eventually we will experience the ultimate Shalom that can only be found in heaven, in the presence of God.

This eventual Shalom is also promised for all of creation.

Through Christ, God will reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross (Colossians 1:19-20).

Scripture tells us how God will make everything new (Revelation 21:5). How He promises a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17) in which righteousness will dwell. No longer will there be anything accursed (Revelation 22:3). He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4).

“And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.” (Hosea 2:18-19).

“In the last days . . . They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:4)

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. ²⁰ No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days . . . ²³ They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity . . . ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,’ says the Lord.” (Isaiah 65)

This is the Shalom that awaits all creation.

God’s promise of Shalom is our hope. The Shalom inside of us and the future Shalom for the world around us. We trust in so many different things for solutions and answers, but today may we humble ourselves and turn back to Christ. He alone is our hope. He has not left us to face life on our own. He has not turned away or ceased to care.

If your life is broken today, let your lack of Shalom drive you to Christ. Let your lack of Shalom turn your heart to the future certainty of the eternal Shalom that awaits all who are in Christ. Turn from your sin and believe in Jesus Christ.

If you are in Christ, let me encourage you to believe. He has given us a new identity, a new nature, and everything that we need for life and godliness. Bow your heart to Him. Submit your situation to Him and ask Him to usher you more fully into the Shalom that He intends for you. As you rest in Christ, it could be that your Shalom has been right there the whole time.

Discussion questions:

1. What did you find most interesting in this sermon?
2. When you think about our world, what are evidence that Shalom has been lost?
3. What reason does the Bible give for all people being born with a sin nature?
4. In your own words, why is Jesus' virgin birth important?
5. How might it affect someone's perspective on life if they know that a present Shalom is available and an eternal Shalom is certain?
6. What do you think you need to remember?
7. What do you need to do about that?
8. How can we pray for you?