

Christmas 2019 ~ Luke 2:1-14 Understanding Peace

Well, usually on Sunday mornings we go through Matthew. We have been going through Matthew for a few years now, actually. But today we are taking a timeout to turn to Luke 2:1-14. Our study of the birth of Christ this morning, Luke chapter 2 verses 1 to 14.

Verses 1-7 is The Introduction to the Birth of Christ. And the emphasis of the section is on the circumstances surrounding His birth, what were the historical settings at the time of His birth.

Verse 1 says, **Now it happened in those days, that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that all the habitable world should be registered.** Notice the literal translation, this is our literal translation. If you are following along in another English translation you will notice that he says *all were going to be taxed*. It is literally *registered*. They were not being taxed; they were signing up as a census for registration that is to come. The habitable world is the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire has been decreed to go and to register. And this is brought about by Caesar Augustus.

And let me read verse 2 before I explain who this man is. **This first registration happened while Cyrenius was governing Syria.** A lot of the technical things that I will share with you, you might not be interested in, or think it is important, but it is because there are people who use this text as a proof text to prove that the birth of Jesus Christ did not happen the way the Bible said so. But one of the proof texts that they say is that Cyrenius, in verse 2, was governor of Syria. That is what most English translations say. That Cyrenius (or Quirinius as some English text have it) was governor of Syria. Well, it is not the word *governor*. It is a present participle, it is *governing*. So Cyrenius was governing, he was a substitute governor at this time. People say, "Well this decree went out from Caesar Augustus, but during the time of Caesar Augustus the emperor of Rome, Cyrenius was not governor, but the Bible says he was governor." The Bible does not say *he was governor*, it says *he was governing*, participle.

But Caesar Augustus is an interesting character, he is a Roman Emperor of the Roman Empire at this time. The word *Caesar* comes from the first Emperor of Rome, Julius Caesar. And all successors after him used the name Caesar in their name to take on the title of Caesar. This particular person is named Gaius Octavius, that is his real name, and he took on the title Caesar. But not only did he take on the title Caesar, but Augustus. *Augustus* is a second title that means *one who is exalted*. So this fellow had some problems. Not only was he a Roman Emperor, but he let everybody know that he is the exalted one, and he bossed people around pretty heavily.

So we have this decree that went out that everybody had to go, and everybody had to register. This registration took place every fourteen years, and it took two to three years to complete. And so the decree said that you had to go and register, you and your family; all the members of your family, you had to go and register in the home city of your family, your family lineage. And of course, since Joseph and Mary were from the household of David they had to go to Bethlehem in order to register for this census.

So, **All were going to be registered, each one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, into the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, on account of he was from out of the house and lineage of David.** This is approximately a seventy-to-eighty-mile trip one way. They are going by donkey. She is eight months pregnant. So she has some difficulties here to deal with, some circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ.

Verse 5, **So he registered with Mary who had been engaged to him as wife, she being pregnant.** The Jews held a time period of one year. They first recited in marriage vows which was the engagement period. And that engagement period was called the pledge of purity and that lasted one year; where they could not live together or function together as husband and wife until the pledge of purity was fulfilled. The pledge of purity was to determine whether the woman is pregnant or not. It is interesting that during her pledge of purity she winds up pregnant. But as we know from Matthew chapter 1, Joseph struggled with this because he knows that he was not the father of the child. So he really did not know what to do with Mary until the Angel spoke to Joseph and told Joseph to take Mary as his wife. So during this one-year pledge of purity engagement time, they traveled to Bethlehem to register. It would be after the one-year pledge of purity that they would then be married, would have a marriage ceremony. But this is when she was engaged to him as his wife.

So to the Jews if you got engaged in that engagement ceremony at the beginning, it took a divorce to break it. Engagement was part of the marriage. And so that is why the text says, *when she was engaged to him as his wife*. She is both, engaged, and as part of the phase of being his wife, **she being pregnant. And it happened while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should give birth. And she gave birth to her son, the Firstborn.** Notice the literal translation of the text. Most English Bibles will say, *and she gave birth to her firstborn son*, but *firstborn* is a title. **She gave birth to her son, the Firstborn, and she wrapped Him in linen cloth, and laid Him in the feeding trough.** I left it in its poetical form from the literal translation. **She wrapped Him in linen cloth and laid Him in the feeding trough** - that is what the Bible says - **because there was no place for them in the inn.** People were traveling. People were registering. People were coming by the hundreds and by the thousands, but there is no place for them in the inn, so Jesus was born in a stable, in a cave, and He was placed in the feeding trough. And that is when the shepherds - we are going to see them in the moment, that is where the shepherds would find Him.

Now the title *firstborn*, it does not necessarily mean *the one who was born first*. *Firstborn* is a title; it means *the member of the family who inherits all things from his father*. It could even be somebody who was born second. It could even be somebody who was a servant of the estate, and the father did not want any of his children to get the inheritance. That servant would then take that the position of firstborn, so the firstborn inherits all things. Here she gives birth to the firstborn, the one who is going to inherit all things of God, and all things of man.

Now before we move on I just want to say this. This is important to see because we get lost in our celebrations every year. We go down and watch the Christmas parade. I do not know if you know it, but Sisquoc has a parade out here. People in their all-terrain vehicles decorated

with Christmas lights and were driving up and down the streets celebrating Christmas out here in Sisquoc. So we have an official parade out here. I think there are probably ten or fifteen cars, probably, traveling all around in the streets, and music blaring, and people yelling.

But in all of the celebration, even in churches, with all of our celebration we lose sight of the fact that Jesus did not come to be celebrated by the world. He was born in a stable. He was placed in the feeding trough after He was born. He was born to poor parents. Parents who were born poor and lived a life of poverty. But more than that the circumstances surrounding the fulfillment of the birth of Christ, their circumstances were very, very difficult. You would think that He would be ushered in on pallets and carried in and given the best room in the house. But He was not.

In fact they, some people get the false impression that Joseph and Mary looked up Micah 5:2 and saw where the Christ child was supposed to be born, in Bethlehem. But they did not. They did not go to Bethlehem because the Bible says to go there. They went to Bethlehem because Caesar Augustus decreed that everybody go to their home village and hometown in order to be registered.

So I am very impressed with the fact that in order for God's Word to be fulfilled, in order for God's will to be fulfilled, there are special difficulties and hardships that accompany it. It is not all a bed of roses. Or it is a bed of roses with the thorns, however you want to see it.

So they fulfilled the will of the Lord by submitting to and being under the decree of Caesar. And they made that seventy-to-eighty-mile trip on a donkey, her eight months pregnant, just for Him to be born in Bethlehem.

Verses 8 to 14, The Proclamation of the Birth of Christ, **Now there were shepherds were in the same region living in fields and keeping watch by night over their flock. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood over them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they feared with great fear.** It is interesting that the announcement of the birth of Christ came to shepherds, not religious leaders, not prominent politicians of the society, but to shepherds. And you say, "What is so special about that?" There were two kinds of people that are considered unclean religiously by the Jews: one are shepherds and two are tax collectors. And we have a common affinity with them for that. But the shepherds are considered unclean because they are living in the fields all the time. They have no way to get into the sanctuary and go through the cleansing ceremonies in order to be qualified to participate in the Temple. So they are considered unclean. But God took unclean people religiously, and announced to them, and revealed to them the birth of Christ. Choosing people who are poor, people who are trudging through hard circumstances, people who are religiously unclean, God takes and He uses them for His glory.

Then in verses 10 through 12, The Communication of the Proclamation. **And the angel said to them, "Stop fearing,"** literally in the Greek text it is a present imperative, *stop doing it, stop continually fearing*, **"for look, I announce to you great joy, which will be to all people; because there was born to you today a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this will be the sign to you; you will find a baby having been wrapped in linen cloth**

and lying in the feeding trough. And suddenly there became with the angel a multitude of the host of heaven, praising God and saying, "Glory in the highest to God, and upon the earth peace, among men of good will."

And notice there at the end of verse 14 [in the study guide] there are two different translations from two different manuscripts as to how this reads. And some people have formulated the wrong understanding of the announcement of the birth of Christ based on one of these translations. It says, *peace on earth among men of goodwill*, or *goodwill toward men*. Most of us are familiar with *peace on earth goodwill toward men*, it is on our Christmas cards, and it is from the King James text. We understand about these two interpretations and these two translations from these manuscripts, but it causes us to arrive at different conclusions.

The one that we are all familiar with, the traditional translation, the *peace on earth goodwill towards men*. People say that at the birth of Christ, that the peace announced at the birth of Christ was the answer to the world's problems. *Peace on earth goodwill towards men*, men will be able to share goodwill with one another if they surrender to the Christ who has come and whose birth was announced on this day of His birth. The problem with that is, first of all, the term *peace on earth goodwill towards men*, if indeed that is what it means. Then if every single person gets saved, every single person on the earth gets saved there still will not be peace. There will not be peace on earth. Satan is still here. Believers are still in the flesh. We still have sin in the world. And so Christ's birth will not bring peace upon the earth in the human, horizontal, circumstantial sense of the word. That is not what it means.

The second translation is instead of goodwill towards men, it is, *peace upon the earth toward men of goodwill*, which means people who have an open receptive attitude towards the Lord. People who are receptive to Christ, to them peace is offered. So the first translation and understanding is universal. People think that the birth of Christ is to bring the universal answer to peace upon the earth. But the more literal translation brings it as an individual answer that peace upon the earth that Christ brings, He brings it toward men of goodwill, towards men who have a good reception towards the things of Christ; they will experience the peace of Christ.

There will not be peace upon the earth until Christ's second coming. When He comes at His second coming, and Satan is bound for one thousand years, and sin and death no longer reigns, then there will be peace upon the earth. But that is not until Christ comes at His second coming. This peace on earth that he is talking about is individual. It is an individual that can have peace on earth. It is an individual that can have peace in the midst of the chaotic world in which we live in. No, this is not the peace, this is individual. But is not only because of the translation that we understand it is peace offered to individuals who are receptive to receiving this peace, but also because of the word peace itself.

The word *peace* in Greek is **εἰρήνη** *eirēnē* and it means *to be united with someone* or *to be at one with someone*. It has nothing to do with a tranquil feeling. It has nothing to do with good feelings. "Oh, I just want to be at peace." Well your flesh might not ever be at peace. This is talking about a spiritual peace that comes with Christ. In fact, it is personal, and it is individual.

Ephesians 2:14 identifies peace for the believer. Ephesians 2:14 says, **Christ is our peace.** So for me to be at peace is for me to be at one with Christ; to be united with Him in the midst of whatever my circumstances or life might be.

The Bible teaches that before you come to know Christ, Romans 8:7 says, **In our natural human state we are hostile against God.** No peace. We are not at peace with God.

But after receiving Christ, Paul said in Romans 5:1, **Therefore having been justified with by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.** It is through Him that I have made peace with God and God has made peace with me. I used to fight Him, but now I am at peace with Him through Jesus Christ my Lord.

So the whole purpose of peace is to be united with Christ in all of my circumstances and all of my situations. As a matter-of-fact Paul said in Colossians 3:15, **Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.** Be at peace. We always associate that with the human. Very hard to be a peace, there is just so much going on. The world is getting worse. Our circumstances are getting worse. And so we are looking to be at peace. But there is only one peace and that is in Christ. It is a spiritual peace. And even though my flesh and my human might be freaking out and having a rough time, my peace comes with Christ and being focused with Him.

The Bible says in Proverbs 23:7, **As a person thinks in his heart so is he.** Whatever my mind is focused on, that is what you are going to see of me. We are not talking about education. We are not talking about intellect. We are talking about whatever I am focused on. If I am going through rough hard times, if mentally I am focused on those hard times, the expression of my life will be the hard times, not the peace of Christ.

Jimmy just a few moments ago mentioned about a fellow who is sick and yet at the same time he is at peace. How can you be at peace when you are sick? It is an inward peace. It is a peace that surrenders to Christ. So when I receive Christ I am making my peace with God. Not with my circumstances, not with my human body, but with Christ. And when I am focused on Him, He keeps me in the secret of His hand.

Again, this is not to be taken as worldly universal peace. It is not to be taken as peace between people. Jesus said in Matthew 10:34-38 says, He says, **Do not think that I came to bring peace upon the earth.** Well I thought they just said, "He is bringing peace upon the earth." **Do not think that I came to bring peace upon earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a person at difference, division, against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies will be they of his own household.** There is going to be no peace there when you have a mixture of people who are believers and people who are nonbelievers. There will not be peace. **He that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that takes not up his cross, and follow after Me, is not worthy of Me.** So peace will not be between people, it is peace with Christ. Peace will not be between nations, not until Christ comes back at His second coming. Peace will be with Christ.

I can actually experience the peace of Christ right here and now, every day that I live here on the earth, by focusing on Christ, setting my mind and heart on Him, and trusting Him with all that I am and all that I have. And people will see the peace of Christ in me. They will see it in my face. They will see it in my life. They will see the difficulties. They will see the hardships. It is not about playing a game, like pretending that nothing is wrong, and nothing has happened. And so there is plenty of chaos going on, but Christ wants to bring us to be at peace. He wants us to experience His peace. And His peace is offered to those who have a good reception to Him in His coming.

So He came on the earth as a baby to bring peace to individuals who are receptive of Him. I pray today that you will know the peace of Christ. Not just believe in Him but know His peace because He is our peace. He never changes. Yesterday, today, and forever, He never changes. He is as solid as the rock that He is, and we can trust Him with everything.

Let's close with prayer.