

Peace in the Middle East

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Date: 20 December 1998

Preacher: Phil Meulman

[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on Sunday the 20th of December 1998 the preacher is Phil Melman his sermon is entitled Peace in the Middle East and is from Luke chapter 2 verses 1 to 14 Thank you Daniel Now kids you've been really good so far I want you to listen for a few moments while I speak and just before I do speak I'm just going to pray so let's just bow our heads and pray Heavenly Father we thank you for your word we thank you that at this time of the year we celebrate your birth and coming into the world please help us to understand what that means for us and that we would go out with great joy to share the good news of the birth of Jesus Amen

Can anybody see this? It's a needle Can anybody see this? What will happen if I stick this needle into this balloon?

It'll pop Would you like me to do it? I'll be careful I'll try not to pop it I don't know if it's going to work as one of these sort of sight gags which just might fall apart on me but I hate sudden noises alright I hate this There you go Did you see that?

What happened? It didn't pop Let me do it again Look It's in the balloon and it didn't pop Can you believe your ears?

Can you believe your eyes? Can you believe your ears? It hasn't popped Isn't that amazing? It worked Three balloons last night did not work Well How can you keep a balloon from popping when you stick a pin in it?

[2 : 2 8] It seems impossible We all thought it was going to pop, didn't we? Well it's almost just like asking the question of how you can keep peace in a potentially explosive world Let me tell you the secret of how we can stop this balloon from popping and you guys everybody can go home and pass it on to the next people around you What you do is you get a balloon and you blow it up about halfway and then you get some sticky tape and you put the sticky tape over it and then you gently put the needle into the balloon where the sticky tape is and it won't pop and it's really good So I'm very thankful that that has just worked Well I'm not going to do it again because it worked the first time So that's the secret of how you stop the balloon from popping and you guys can go and work on that yourselves and you can pass it on

Now let me ask the question of what can help us hold this world together and I can only think of one force strong enough for that and that is the special holding power of God's love That is the only thing strong enough for such an enormous task of holding this world together Let me ask you another question What has been the biggest news item this week?

You don't have to answer it because you all know it It's been the fact that Britain and the United States have resumed bombing strategic sites in Iraq to curtail Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction And the other thing about that to me is that it seems that they too are using weapons of mass destruction themselves to bring about a resolution It's bizarre It's odd But there's certainly no peace in the Middle East at this time The United Nations for many years has been boasting about the fact that they have maintained peace throughout the world But the reality is that there is little peace in many areas of the world And all of our eyes at this time are drawn to the Middle East in Iraq Israel Kuwait and Palestine and so on Tension and hostility is building up between people

And it is literally explosive And sadly many innocent lives will be lost due to people who are abusing power on both sides I think Well even in our own country at this time of the year the tension and the hostility between people is potentially explosive The barrage of Christmas spending and shopping on top of the already hectic lifestyles that we lead sets us up for the odd hostile encounter with family with friends and even with people that we don't know The other day my car was parked in a shopping centre while I went and did some grocery shopping I know that some of you might find that hard to believe that I did some grocery shopping but I did I went to do some shopping for someone and an announcement came over the PA Would the owner of motor vehicle

NQS 666 please move their vehicle immediately I had a shopping trolley that was full of groceries Why Lord Why me now I've got to get this done and most of all it's embarrassing Have you ever had your car's number plate called out of the PA system it's embarrassing Well I had to move it I had to go and move it I thought that I must have been parked in a handicapped spot or someone had perhaps hit my car or something had happened or something like that but it turned out that my car was parked too close to someone else's car who was unable to get into it into their own vehicle so when I got there that particular person was not very happy with me and I felt like because I was busy and I was running late and so on I felt like exploding back at them but then I realised that she was right and I was wrong

[7 : 22] I hadn't parked my car properly in my haste to go and do this good deed that I thought I was doing at the time my car was over the lines and it was quite close to her car I didn't notice at the time well at the time Jesus was born there was little or no peace in people's lives either people may have had simpler lifestyles in some ways but there was still a lot of hostility and tensions among nations there was lots of hostility and tensions among nations and individuals as well and there were certainly a lot of misguided views among people as to how peace with God could be made many people thought that they knew what it was that they had to do but the things that they did went to show just how far away from God they really were what was the message of the angels to the shepherds in the fields outside

Bethlehem that we just had read to us the message was this it was glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors peace among those whom he favors now an angel is a messenger from God who generally came to people with an instruction for people to follow and sometimes in the Bible we see that when an angel of the Lord appears to people there is often great fear associated with it by the people from the people whom the angel appears to for example in the story of Samson in the Old Testament in the book of Judges it begins by an angel of the Lord appearing to Samson's parents Samson wasn't born at this time and giving Samson's parents instructions about how this boy that is to be born is to be brought up and he's to be a Nazarite he's not to cut his hair and so on there's all these instructions given and when his parents realize that they have seen an angel of the Lord face to face

Manoah who is the father says that surely we will die because we have seen God there is great fear associated with it and similarly here when the angel of the Lord first appears to the shepherds there is great fear great fear they were terrified as the text says but what does the angel say to them do not be afraid the message that they bring is good news well what's the message that they bring it's threefold really firstly they say a saviour someone who will save someone has been born but more than that it is secondly not just the saviour but it is the messiah the chosen one by God so this saviour is going to do a lot of saving but this person isn't just anyone no not far from it he is thirdly the

Lord this person is the Lord a name only ascribed to God in the Bible this saviour messiah and Lord has been born and it is very good news and finally to show the extent of this good news a whole multitude of the heavenly host appears praising God and saying together glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those whom he favours a whole heavenly host appears before these terrified shepherds God's peace has been brought into the world through the Lord Jesus Christ and it begins back at that first Christmas and is demonstrated on the cross when God gave up his only son so that the sins of those who are truly sorry for the things that they have done wrong before

God may be forgiven when we know that and receive it and believe it we too can have a personal relationship with the creator of heaven and earth of you and me and then we too can be at peace there is nothing that we need be afraid of not wars not angry people in the car park or even things that we do which are wrong as Christians people who love God and follow the Lord Jesus Christ in actions in prayer and so on we have real peace because there is a glorious future waiting for us now the shepherds were afraid at first of these angels but later later on in Luke chapter 2 we read that they went on they glorified and praised

[12 : 53] God for all that they had seen and heard for the message that they had been told was true so they too could have peace with God even a shepherd was able to have peace with God a lowly person in those times well peace was brought about for them entirely on God's initiative and is brought about for us as well entirely on God's initiative now a few moments ago I told you the secret of how we could avoid the balloon popping didn't I and if you're like me you're probably glad it didn't pop I hate it when balloons pop it creates stress my heart races and all sorts of things my stress levels go up the good news that the shepherds received from the angel of the Lord was passed on with great joy to others their stress levels would have decreased and we too as

God's people need to pass on the message of his peace by sharing God's love and loving others in return now it's our turn to share the message of the angels with those around you to take the love of God and share his spirit and power within this world it's a huge task and it's not going to be easy from time to time but it must begin somewhere friends may this Christmas season be a time where you may be able to do just that and may it also be a time where you know God's peace in your lives despite the turmoil of this outside world that is going on may we have peace through the Lord Jesus Christ Amen