April 17, 2005

Peace On Earth

This past week a series began on television based on popular writings about the interpretations of events leading up to the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. The show is aptly named "Revelations" and, in the minds of some, is a depiction of what will occur at some point in the world. Aside from the misinterpretation of scripture that form the basis of this belief, there is another misconception that surfaces when this idea is promoted. There are many in the religious world who believe that there will be peace on earth at some point and point to wars and other things as being a "sign" of the end of all things. While the depiction of these things make for good fiction, we must search the scriptures to see if Christ ever promised an end to conflict as we see it. When Christ was born there were shepherds in the field keeping their flocks to whom angels appeared. "*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, good will toward men.*" (**Luke 2.13-14**). We usually hear this phrase quite a bit around the time of December since that is when the religious world around celebrates the birth of Christ. Cynics who deny the Lord point to this statement, and the belief in peace in a physical sense, as a manifestation of a human myth since peace has not yet come into the world. In popular culture there are references to this in songs, the media and other areas, citing the lack of peace as the basis for rejecting the Gospel message. It is necessary to understand the peace that Christ brought into the world. At no time did Christ promise such a thing. On the contrary, Christ was clear that there would continue to be wars and conflicts and even warned his disciples that these things would happen. "*And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.*" (**Matt 24.6-7**). Since the time of Christ, war and conflict has been a reality of life for much of that time. In the past century alone there have been conflicts so great that they have changed the course of humanity and technology for all time. Are these things a sign that the Bible is flawed and not to be trusted? To answer this we need only turn to the statements of Christ as recorded in the scriptures. Christ, speaking to his disciples, stated, "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*" (**Matt 10.34**). Now we have a conflict in the scriptures that we need to resolve, and do so without violating the context or meaning of the Bible. The angels stated that Christ's birth signaled peace on earth. Christ stated that he did not come to bring peace, and we know that history bears out that violence and warfare are a fact of life. Does this render the Bible obsolete as a failure to resolve the problems of human life including war and other violence? The answer to that is no. Did Christ come to bring peace into the world? Yes, he did. Was that physical peace and an end to the commotions that threaten all of us from time to time. Again, the answer to that is no. The prophet Jeremiah states, "*A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the LORD.*" (**Jer 25.31**). Part of this statement can be applied to the fact that God's people had departed from him and so he revealed his judgment against them. That judgment was delivered in a physical sense when they were overtaken by their enemies. In another sense there is a controversy that God has with all flesh. That is in the existence of sin in the world and the godless attitudes that mankind follows. It was necessary that Christ should die, this was God's plan from the beginning (**Titus 1.1-2, Acts 2.23-24**). The entire world is lost in sin and the only way that peace can be made with God is through obedience to him through Christ. The scriptures speak of this peace, to the Jews first, who prepared the world for the coming of Christ, and to the Gentiles who had been lost in their idolatry and error. Paul speaks of this peace as he addresses the Ephesians. " *But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.*" (**Eph 2.13-20**). The peace that the scriptures is not a world without tribulation, but rather, the peace that we can have with God. Some then may continue to reject the scriptures stating that there is no unity in the body of those who claim to be believers. The conflict and division that is found in the religious world is based on a failure to accept what is written in God's word and holding to it. Speaking of unity and peace among believers, Paul explained how this can be achieved. "*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*" (**Eph 4.1-6**). Christ was also clear about the fact that there would be few who would discipline themselves by following after him according to his commands. "*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*" (*Matt 7.13-15*). The only way that one can have peace with God is by obeying that form of doctrine that we find in the New Testament. The human mind rejects this notion but there are the few who will seek and find the truth by submitting to God. To these souls, God will grant peace through his Son. Eternal spiritual peace. *TLC*