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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**December 17, 2017**

**War and Peace**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father God, I do thank you for the gift of Christmas, I thank you for what an literally inconceivable gift it is, Lord, it is well beyond human understanding to fully grasp what it is you gave us by becoming flesh and joining us on this planet. And Lord, this morning we're going to again look into your word, we're going to try to increase our understanding a little bit of just what that involved. And we just again pray for your Spirit to accompany us, that your -- we know that your Holy Spirit, if he's not accompanying us, these will just be words, they won't make any sense, they'll go in one ear and out the other, and so we pray that you will guide us, open up our hearts, our minds, our ears, and our eyes as we listen to your word and make them of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, if you've been here for any of my past messages you know that we've been doing a series about prayer and you probably know that one of the themes that I've spoken about over and over again is this idea that we are at war. I'm probably going to sound like a

broken record here because I've spoken over and over again about the fact that there was first and foremost this war that actually took place in heaven and that this war spilled over to earth and ever since the fall of Adam, we have been pivotally involved in fighting that war. And Christmas is really a unique time to look at this whole idea of war and peace because the birth of Jesus Christ represents the very height of what God was willing to do to bring about peace between God and man. And so I want to set the stage about this war footing that we are on because until you fully grasp the idea that we are at war, you won't be able to really grasp the wonder of the peace that has been offered to us in the birth of Jesus Christ.

You see, it's easy to gloss over the idea that God states with very little fanfare in scripture in Revelation a statement that he makes. He says this in *Revelation 12:7*, he says: *Now war arose in heaven. This was the original star wars. This was the real thing. Revelation 12:7 says: Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back.* God is talking about a war that is taking place among two different alien populations. Now I say "alien" because neither of the combatants in this war was human. Both sides who were engaged in this war are created beings who are outside of everything we know that constitutes this material existence.

Now take this little statement that God made and place it against the backdrop of this desperate search that we are constantly undertaking for life on other planets. There's a reason for the desperation for the search for extraterrestrial life. You see, if you believe that life on this planet arose from nothing but random chance and billions and billions of years of time, then the fact that we've learned that there are trillions and trillions of planets and galaxies surrounding us has to mean that by the simple law of averages, we're going to have hundreds and hundreds of planets just like ours, given the odds. And so we spend hundreds of thousands of man hours and millions and millions of dollars involved in things like SETI, which is an acronym for the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence. You know I could save our scientific community an awful lot of time and money by pointing out that we've already located an extraterrestrial intelligence and it's so far along in its developments that we actually have a report of a war that took place between two rival castes of these extraterrestrials. I mean just think about this for a minute. God almost casually mentions the fact that somewhere in a plane of existence none of us are familiar with, war broke out among creatures that are unlike anything that we find here on earth. And it really did happen. And God described it this way in *Revelation 12*, he says: *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels*

*fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world -- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*

God states as a very simple fact that there are at least two ongoing planes of existence operating simultaneously in this life. I mean there's the flesh and blood existence that you and I know of that consists mainly of the things that we can perceive with our senses and God says there's yet another completely separate plane of existence that operates around us and often intersects with us that is outside the ability of our senses to perceive. I mean we get tantalizing little information about this other world other than an occasional fact that we can glean from accounts that occur in scripture. You know Paul in Ephesians 6, he tells us there are different categories of creatures that occupy this sphere of existence and that we, whether we are aware of it or not, we are engaged in warfare with these fallen angels. Paul says in *Ephesians 6:12: For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* So what we have here is Paul is

describing possibly four different categories of these fallen creatures. He talks about rulers, he talks about authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil. And *Colossians 2:15* goes on to describe how Jesus triumphed over two of those categories at the cross. It says this: *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.* And then Peter gives us another little piece of information. He tells us that some of these fallen angels were thrust immediately into prison after they rebelled. He says this in *2 Peter 2:4*, it says: *For God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them into chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.* Well, we know others were left on earth for reasons known only to God and that these fallen angels constitute the kingdom of darkness. On the other hand, there are angels who represent the kingdom of light.

But first I want to make one thing perfectly clear about where these angels come from and where they definitely do not come from. Understand, angels are a completely separate part of God's creation and are unlike human beings by their very nature. They are not former human beings who upon dying became angels. I don't know how many times I've heard people in their sorrow suggest that their loved one is now "an angel in heaven." That's not at all what the Bible teaches about human beings or angels. And the Bible is quite

clear that we do not become angels. It says instead after we die we face judgment. *Hebrews 9* says: *It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* So if you die as a believer in Jesus Christ, if you by faith have accepted that Jesus Christ has paid your penalty for sin at the cross, you will be immediately with Christ in heaven. And if you have not accepted that gospel, you're going to be held in a place of judgment until the appointed time of final judgment and neither the temporary nor the permanent place of judgment will be anything but awful and it's the last thing I want for any of you. Understand, in no way does any human being ever enter into an angelic state either good or bad simply by dying. It does not happen. Angels are angels and human beings are human beings and human beings never become angels. And on any given day the angels of light and the angels of darkness are doing battle all around us. And all of it or at least almost all of it is simply beyond our senses.

Now we also learned from scripture that there are military type divisions among the forces of light as well as the forces of darkness. Speaking of Christ's ascension into heaven, Peter says this of Jesus, says: *Jesus, who has gone into heaven and who is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.* Well that's three different levels of being right there. And we also know from scripture that in addition to

the authorities and powers, there are seraphim who stand literally in the presence of God and there's cherubim who guard sacred things and that there's archangels like Gabriel who bring messages back and forth between the two kingdoms or Michael who acts as a warrior. We saw him mentioned in *Revelation* where it says: *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon.* Michael also appears in the book of Daniel. And once again Daniel gives us a little tiny piece of information about this ongoing war between the forces of light and darkness. In Daniel we have this encounter described by Daniel in which he finds a man clothed in linen who is so terrifying when he appears that all of Daniel's companions flee, they just take off, and Daniel says he was left alone and at the sight of this man, all of his strength left him and he fell down as if dead. Well, some folks think that this was the pre-incarnate Christ appearing to Daniel but others dispute that and they dispute that because the angel then describes in this passage struggling for three weeks with a fallen angel. And that fallen angel is referred to as the prince of the kingdom of Persia. Listen to what the angel says in *Daniel 10*. He says: *"Fear not, Daniel, from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there*

*with the kings of Persia.*" And so what we learn by this little piece of information in Daniel is that there was a very powerful angel locked in battle for three straight weeks with a very powerful fallen angel who was in charge of the kingdom of Persia, and apparently he was deadlocked until the archangel Michael came to help him. And what also we can glean from that is that these fallen angels appear to have some type of territorial rule, and just like in earthly warfare, sometimes angels are in need of reinforcement in battle. I mean there's lots of other references to supernatural things going on around this world that we are completely unaware of. I mean God tells us in Hebrews that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, and we're not told that these witnesses are saints who have gone on before us or angels or both, but suffice to say we are not even remotely alone. We are surrounded by aliens and by that I don't mean little green men from other planets, but simply to acknowledge the fact that there are great numbers of creatures who are everything that the desperate searches for extraterrestrial life are looking for. They are intelligent, they are engaged, they are aware, and some of them want nothing more than to destroy us and to wreak havoc. And others have been sent specifically by God to surround and protect us and to do battle with those who would harm us.

I don't imagine the searchers for extraterrestrial life have any



interest in pursuing that type of alien who's here on earth, but the idea of this type of cosmic war is something that pervades nearly every level of our consciousness and it sounds like the stuff of fairy tales but it's absolute reality. And I've mentioned before the reason why fairy tales have such longevity is because the gospel story itself reads like a fairy tale. You see, there really was a good prince and there really was an evil prince and an evil prince really went to war against the king and was thrown out of the kingdom and landed here on earth. The good prince left his kingdom and came down to earth to do battle with the evil prince. And in order to do that he had to join the very people he was rescuing and become one of them. So the good prince left everything behind and he lived among those he had come to rescue showing them how to live a perfect life. But in the end, the very people that he came to rescue turned on him. And even though the authorities knew he was innocent, he was captured, arrested, tortured and crucified. Well, three days later he rose from the dead to claim that death itself was not able to conquer him and that the sacrifice that he had made of his perfect life would be applied to any and all who would be willing to put their faith in him. They could enter the kingdom now based on his goodness and not on their own. It's the ultimate fairy tale and it's rooted in absolute truth. Now most folks by and large reject that truth but they're still drawn to the idea of fairy tales. And whether it's

*Lord of the Rings* or *Star Wars*, it still comes down as it always does to a battle between good and evil. And this leads us every year to the Christmas story. For many it's just another lovely fairy tale. But for believers in Jesus Christ, it is the ultimate story of war and peace and God's sacrifice to provide peace.

The story unfolds in *Luke 2*. It says: *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 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 among those with whom he is pleased!"*

Now you might not know but there's a problem, there's a controversy over that last verse that I just read. I mean if you've ever received a Christmas card with that inscription on it, there's no doubt you received the King James version which ends verse 14 by saying: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will*

toward men. Have you ever heard that? Yeah, everybody's heard that. Well, that's a very unfortunate translation based on the Greek word "eudokia." You see, some of the original Greek manuscripts have an "s" on the end of that word and some of them don't. Unfortunately the little Greek sigma or "s" changes the meaning of that phrase entirely. You see in one instance the word means "good will" in the other instance it means "good pleasure." And if the term means "good will" then it refers to man and God's good feelings or intention towards all of mankind. If the term means "good pleasure," well then it really means God's offer of peace extended to those in whom God finds pleasure. Those are two vastly different thoughts. It turns out the great majority of modern translations are taken from manuscripts that include the sigma at the end, meaning as the ESV says, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" Or as the NIV puts it: "*Glory to God on the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests!*" Or as the Holman version says: "*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!*" You see, as much as it makes for a nice Christmas card, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men*" fails to convey something that is absolutely critical that we're talking about this morning. And that's that there is a state of war that has existed ever since the war in heaven and the fall of Adam. And the fact is the Bible is

quite clear there is no general state of good will that God has toward men whether it is Christmastime or not and that is perhaps the greatest part of the struggle that we have in sharing the gospel. I mean it's extremely hard to tell folks that peace is being offered when they have no idea that we're in a state of war in the first place nor do they realize what God went through to bring us this peace. See, when the shepherds met the angel that night, they saw an overwhelming response by the heavenly host and at that point it was only the angels who knew what an astounding event was taking place. It was the angels who knew that the good prince, that God himself, the second person of the trinity, the one who existed for all time in transcendental perfection, that one, the one who had by the very power of his own word created the entire universe, they knew that this prince was now going to enter a fallen, cursed world. He's going to enter it not as a prince, or as royalty but as a peasant child born in extreme poverty. At this time it was only the angels who had an inkling of the enormity of the sacrifice this prince of the universe was making. I mean the very one who had spoken the galaxies into existence would now find himself powerless in ways no one could anticipate.

This is how Doug Wilson puts it. He says: "He, the eternal Word, the one who spoke the galaxies into existence, was willing to become a little baby boy who could do nothing with words except

jabber, and in that jabbering, make glad his mother and earthly father. He, the source of all life and all nourishment for that life, was willing to be breast fed. He, the same one who had separated the night from the day, and had shaped the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night, was willing to have his diapers changed for a year or so. It is not disrespectful to speak this way; for Christians, it is disrespectful not to. We believe in the Incarnation, in the Word made flesh. This is our glory; this is our salvation." And you know nine months before Jesus arrived, the greatest power in the universe went to the point microscopically shy of annihilation. God himself became a human zygote clinging to the womb of his mother dependent entirely on her for nourishment, protection and survival. God himself went from a position of the greatest power in the universe to the very least the universe could tolerate without self-annihilation. Nobody knew that. Only the angels had an inkling of the distance the good prince was willing to go for the people on whom his favor rested. They saw absolute omnipotence transformed to the human extreme of powerlessness. They saw spotless perfection entering into a world where there was no perfection whatsoever. They saw the one who was surrounded by effulgent glory, a glory that these angels had been part of from the dawn of time now lying helpless and completely powerless in a feeding trough in a barn. So they couldn't help but burst into praise and worship at the distance that this prince

would go to to extend peace to a world that in the end would slaughter him for his efforts. You see, the angels knew a lot more about the warfare that was ongoing than the people of earth did. And it turns out that when it comes to peace on earth, good will to men, there was neither peace on earth nor good will from God to man or man to God. In fact there was war.

This is a what God said of man in *Romans 3*. He said: *As it is written, "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. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."* You see what had so moved the angels was the fact that God would be willing to leave heaven for people such as that and there was in fact no fear of God before their eyes. I mean Herod was Jesus's earthly king. He was the earthly king of the Jews, the very people group the prince consented to enter earth through. He sought to kill Jesus as a baby. I mean his neighbors saw Jesus as an illegitimate child born out of wedlock and worthy of disgrace. His own brothers refused to accept that he was God in the flesh until after we had already

killed him. It was God and the angels who alone fully knew that he would live out what God had written years before when he said in *Isaiah 53: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. See, it was the angels who were saying: "Glory to God in the highest"* because they and maybe -- maybe a few prophets were the only ones who knew that this obscure, impoverished infant born of peasant parents in a backwater town was in fact the King of the universe who would come at last to bring peace not to men of good will because there was no men of good will, peace would come but only to those on whom his favor rests. Most of you hearing my words are those very people. And when the angels shouted out *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests!"* they were speaking of you and me. We've been given the greatest privilege the universe has ever known.

And lest we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to, consider that the very first humans these angels were speaking to, the very first humans to encounter the prince, they were shepherds.

These were people occupying the lowest possible social class there was in that day. They were the lowest of the low. Randy Alcorn says: "The Mishnah, Judaism's written record of the oral law, also reflects this prejudice, referring to shepherds in belittling terms. One passage describes them as 'incompetent.' Another says no one should ever feel obligated to rescue a shepherd who has fallen into a pit. Smug religious leaders maintained a strict caste system at the expense of shepherds and other common folk. Shepherds were officially labeled 'sinners' -- a technical term for a class of despised people. How perfectly scandalous, how perfectly appropriate for God to announce his presence on earth to the lowest caste of human beings." To lowly shepherds. And how unbelievably amazingly stunning it is that this very God would announce his presence on earth to me or to you, that you and I would be among those on whom his favor rests.

I mean the one thing that we can say with certainty about Christmas itself is that everything that everyone ever thought about how God would bring peace to man was completely backwards or just plain wrong. And when you think about it, shepherds were the perfect people to be the first to meet the incoming prince because as *1 Corinthians* says: *The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: Not many of you were wise according to worldly*



*standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as is it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

So let me boast in a Lord who has chosen the fools of this world, that's us, to shame the wise. It was Paul who said: *Let no one deceive himself. If any among you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness."* Now I once heard of a man who carried around a sandwich sign that had that very scripture written on it, and underneath it in very bold letters he had written: "I am a fool for Christ." On the other side of the sign there was one simple question, it said, "Whose fool are you?" See that's the way the war goes. The very first human who was ever born fell in the garden and gave up his perfection and then he passed on that imperfection along with his hatred for God to every one of his subsequent offspring. And this is where war and peace gets down to

street level. This is why even the nicest unbeliever finds himself or herself at war with God. They just don't realize it. I mean Jesus told his disciples that they would be hated because the world hated him first and that hatred is something that every human being is born with. It's an unconscious hatred that makes your unsaved friends and neighbors unwilling to even consider the claims of Christ that leaves them thankful that they're not saddled with this so-called favor. I mean that's exactly the fool that I was before God intervened in my life. And that's why God says in *Psalm 53*: *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* See, you and I were born as sons of Adam already settled into this world as fools. And for reasons known to God and God alone, you and I have been given peace on whom his favor rests. I mean, if you were one of his, it is only because God opened up your eyes and your ears and made you one of his sheep. And God is careful to say that if you love Christ, you have him to thank and not yourself. *Ephesians 2* says: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast.*

I wanted to just take a second here to go down a side road of sort, this is not a rabbit trail but this is a different trail, inspired by *Ephesians 2:8*. I just want to mention that on Thursday of this past week one of the greatest theological influences in my life

died, and that was R.C. Sproul. It was R.C. Sproul who radically changed my view of grace and God and just what Ephesians 2:8 is trying to say. And I spent a lot of Friday just reading the tributes of some of the great church leaders about the profound influence that R.C. had on them and I realized just how far down the line that influence went, because this church and this view, this idea that the profound truth of the sovereignty of God and the centrality of the glory of Christ over everything else owes much of its understanding to the legacy of Dr. R.C. Sproul. I mean his books *Chosen by God* and *The Holiness of God* shaped my spiritual life more profoundly than anything other than scripture itself and I will forever be grateful to him. And if you just take a step back and look at what Christmas is trying to tell us, it's telling us one thing that R.C. believed and it's really obvious and that is you will never, never, never be able to figure out the ways of God, why we found favor and why those who reject the peace of Christ have not? I mean the entire Jewish nation rejected Christ as Messiah because they were absolutely certain that he had failed to conform to a certain pathway that they felt very confident they had learned from the scripture itself. I mean the Messiah they were certain was going to be this powerful earthly king, was going to rescue an oppressed Jewish nation from the grip of Rome. They were terribly mistaken. But far worse, they were terribly and willingly blind. We have the benefit of working backwards from the actual

events of God's entrance into earth and we get to see how the prophecies that were written hundreds of years before Jesus was even born, how perfectly they unfold. Like Micah 5 which says: *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.*

See, we have the benefit of thousands of years of foresight. We get to put the pieces of the puzzle together. We get to see all of the prophecies that God had sprinkled throughout the Old Testament including the one that we just read that said the king is going to be born in Bethlehem. Well, the contemporaries of Jesus's day thought that he was from Nazareth in Galilee, and they were convinced that that was a place that no good could ever come from. In *John 7*, speaking to Jesus, *They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."* Well hence Jesus couldn't be the Messiah. But if they had taken the time to understand his history, they would have realized that a

census had been called for and that everyone had to return to their original hometown, that in the course of the journey this very pregnant Mary who found "no room at the inn" wound up giving birth in a cave of all places where? In Bethlehem. They would have seen and understood *Micah 5: But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days.* Now if they had understood their history, perhaps they would have understood this horrific prophesy in Jeremiah. *Jeremiah 31 says: Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."* They would have understood that the monster Herod, upon hearing from the Magi that a king was about to be born took out his paranoid rage by demanding that all male children under two be slaughtered. We understand precisely what Jeremiah was speaking about even if his contemporaries didn't.

And you know, speaking of the Magi adds yet another layer of mystery to this idea of war and peace to this idea that you will never understand the ways of God. I mean, make no mistake about it, God and man were at war back then and to a large extent they are at war even now but it is God who makes the sacrifice of peace. It is God who went way beyond the extra mile to provide an end to

the warfare and bring genuine peace to everyone who would by faith trust in his Son. You know, I never even gave a thought about the Magi except to wonder if maybe they were kings because everyone knows the song, "We Three Kings of Orient Are" and maybe they were magicians. God forbid they would be astrologers. I mean they couldn't possibly be astrologers because God has this to say about astrology in *Isaiah 47*: *Let them stand forth and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons make known what shall come upon you. Behold, they are like stubble; the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame.* God has a pretty low opinion of astrology. Deuteronomy calls it abomination. Well, why is God inviting those folks to worship Christ?

Listen to what Jon Bloom of *Desiring God* writes. He says this: "God took things to a whole different level by summoning only one other group of people to welcome his divine Son into the world: the 'magoi.' Some English translators transliterate this Greek word into English as 'magi.' Others use the term 'wise men,' but it doesn't capture the surreal nature of these strange visitors. Of all the unlikely characters and events in this story, these may be the unlikeliest. The magi were pagan Persian priests and/or astrologers. They were experts in sorcery, divination, and other mysterious magical arts and literature. They were 'wise' in the

things God strictly forbade the Jews from participating in. And God summoned them through astrological divination by using some sort of 'star'. Today, it might be like God choosing to bypass everyone else and summoning through tarot cards or crystals a group of Wiccans to come worship the baby Jesus."

Think about that. I mean think about what God is doing.

Astrologers? Really? God, that's really who you were inviting here? I mean Bloom goes on to say: "Does that make you squirm? That's how you should feel at the arrival of the Magi in the story -- until you make the missional connection with the purpose of Christmas. Then you worship alongside these pagan welcomers of the Savior of the world." You see, in spite of who they were, in spite of what it was they had done, these were people on whom God's favor rested and God was determined to ransom and rescue them just like he ransomed and rescued us.

My conclusion for this morning is my question for you all: As for those on whom God's favor has rested, as those to whom the Christmas story makes ultimate sense, what will you do this Christmas season to share the privilege that you've been given with others who are still blinded by the god of this world? God left heaven itself to enter into our world to provide peace for us, to give himself to end the war between God and man by living a perfect

life on earth and presenting that perfect life as payment in full for my life of sin on a cross. And so my question this morning is: Are you willing, are you willing for a moment to leave your comfort zone to share with someone that good news? You know, there's usually only one time of the year that we're allowed to even broach the subject of who Christ was and the impact that he's had on our lives. I want to conclude today's message by praying that each of us in the next week or so is going to have the opportunity to share some of that good news with those who are still blinded and still at war with those who are still waiting for God's favor to finally rest on them. Let's pray.

*Father God, we thank you for the immeasurable gift that you have given to us. I cannot believe that your favor has rested on me. It's just astounding to me. It's beyond all belief that I would have the ability to connect the dots and make this make sense. It doesn't come from me, it comes from you; it's the ultimate gift. And what a privilege we have, what a responsibility we have, we are surrounded by people to whom this story is nonsense, strict fairy tale. And Lord, I pray that each of us would be praying even now that each of us would be moved out of our comfort zone to be willing to share with others who are absolutely lost and at war with their creator. What God has done, what he has done to bring peace. We pray, Lord, that you would give us the ability to share*



*that gospel and that your favor would rest on each person to whom  
it is shared with. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*