



A Quiet Christmas
Part 3 – Peace on Earth, Peace of Mind
Adam Donyes

We are in *Peace on Earth, Peace of Mind*. We are going to talk about a peace of mind. Before we do that, can we give it up for the harp player? Just the whole set up. I text Amy this morning. The whole environments, the setting; it's unbelievable what this church does and how awesome it looks. I could walk over there and not do anything close to what she has pulled off. We're so blessed.

How many of you, as we've been going through the worship music and seeing the words on the screen in the last couple of weeks, are like, "I didn't know that word was in that song; I kind of hum through that every year"? When I grew up in church, we didn't have power points and monitors, so you just kind of heard it a little bit and went with it. It's the same with... I'll confess that a couple of years ago, I finally figured out that, in the national anthem, it's not "for the land," it's o-e-r. I didn't even know that was a word. I had no idea. I've been saying the wrong thing for years and no one ever corrected me as I belted it out right next to them at baseball games. Music is powerful. That's why we set the tone here at church every week to kick off with music because music sets our hearts and our minds on the right thing.

As a matter of fact, music is so powerful that ad agencies spend millions of dollars to try to get you hooked in. Check this out. Sing along if you know it. "You work too hard, you make too much, the cheesecake made you greedy; let your aching head and stomach hear this message from old Speedy." Alka Seltzer. "Plop, plop, fizz, fizz, oh, what a relief it is." I love it. All the people that are like 45 and up, completely know it. And all the young people have no idea. Last service, the whole congregation knew that song. I purposely did that. That's a famous ad from like the late 60s to early 70s.

Let me help the younger generation. [plays jingle music for McDonalds] Man, music is powerful isn't it? Watch how quickly you get this one. [plays jingle music] "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there." Music sucks you in so quickly. You instantly picture this red polo shirt guy sitting on the hood of a car with a basketball player. How about this last one? "One, two, one, two, three, four. Gimme a break, gimme a break, break me off a piece of that Kit Kat Bar." They spent millions of dollars getting these little jingles in your ears.

Think about the songs that you can just hear from your favorite sit-coms and you instantly know it. You have these songs in your head. They do this intentionally because music helps our thoughts, music drives our thoughts. So, to say what we listen to doesn't impact us is crazy. Companies wouldn't spend millions of dollars if what we listen to didn't affect us.

Now, I'm not telling you guys you have to listen all Christian music because most of you in here think country music is Christian music... contrary to popular belief. But you know if you play a country song backwards, you're going to get your wife, your dog, and your house back. Music is powerful, so when we talk about peace of mind, we have to start talking about what we're listening to. When you talk about the five senses: touch, smell, sight, sound, taste, **the most two powerful of those senses that drive our thoughts are listening and images, what we look at.**

Yell out the Christmas movie as you see the image. *Home Alone*. That's iconic. Images are so powerful. I can still close my eyes and think about 9/11 and see one tower on fire and another tower in the horizon. I can see it as clear as day. For some of you that are older, you can still see the 1960 image of the flag going on the moon. Or in the 80s, as a child, I remember that Berlin Wall coming down. I can see that image. Images are so powerful. And what we see also drives our thoughts. I told you the most powerful two sense that drive our thoughts are what we listen to and what we see.

How about this movie? *Elf*. Greatest Christmas movie of all time. "You sit on a throne of lies and smell of beef and cheese." It's iconic. Any Christmas movie that has Will Farrell; try to beat it. What about this one? You guys know this one. *A Christmas Story*. "You'll shoot your eye out, kid." How many have already seen it for the season? Holy Sinners! How have you not seen this movie? This is a tradition; you've got to see this. How many are planning to see it before Christmas? It's a classic. How about this one? *It's a Wonderful Life*. "Every time a bell rings, an angel gets it's wings." See that? You see an image... It's crazy how all those things tie together – how what we see, what we lay our eyes on and what we listen to matters.

I did some research and you can do the same research. Look at this menu. So, there's statistical and analytical data that proves that when restaurants put images of food items on their menu, that item increase by 30% or more in sales. "I don't know what I want. I want that." There's an image, I can see an image, I can relate to an image; "I just want that." How many of you are guilty of this? You walk into Chili's and you're like, "I don't know what I want. That looks good; that's what I want." Why do you think, in some restaurants, they come out with the dessert tray? "I know you don't have any room; I just stuffed you with chips and salsa, but here's some dessert for you to look at." That's because eyes drive it, right? Our eyes and our ears actually drive out thoughts, so what we listen to and what we watch actually has a big impact on what we think about during Christmas season. Our eyes and ears drive our thoughts. And marketing agencies spend millions of dollars knowing this impacts you and me.

Job actually knew this. He knew how much his eyes would impact his thoughts. In Job 31, he said, **1 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.** He knew that if he began looking lustfully at a woman, he would begin chasing that woman. He knew that if his eyes started looking at another woman, another man's wife, his thoughts would start going there. He knew it started with his eyes, so he knew if he prevented his eyes from looking at anything he shouldn't look at, it would prevent it from getting in his thoughts, in his quiet mind.

David knew this in Psalm 101. He says, **3 I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.** I love that visual. I'm not going to put anything vile before my eyes because I don't want it to cling to my mind and my heart. He understood

the power of the eyes that God has given us and when we allow our eyes to drive us, drive our thoughts, it takes us down a path we may not want to go, as we're going to see here in just a second.

And ears... Solomon understood ears. In Proverbs 17, he says, **4 *An evildoer listens to wicked lips, and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue.*** So, what are we listening to? If we are listening to country music or secular music... I tell the kids I mentor all the time, "You can't tell me that rap doesn't influence you. Look at the gold chain you're wearing. Look at the language you're using. You can't tell me the music we listen to doesn't impact our thoughts."

The question is what are we listening to? What advice are we listening to? What co-employees are we listening to? What news stations are we listening to? What talk show hosts are we listening to? What are we listening to? Because the reality is what we listen to drives our thoughts. Think about it. People that watch Fox News all the time, think the way Fox News thinks. People that watch CNN all the time, think the way CNN thinks. What we listen to and what we watch affects the way we think. It's proven.

Paul knew this also in 2 Timothy 4: 3-4, which is really important. **3 *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching...*** It's why I love Ted and this church. For as long as I've been here, he has not gotten away from the truth. He's never wavered, squandered, or gotten away... He knows what people may want to hear, but he's always stayed true to the Word of God. It's not going to happen, but if this church were to ever get away from holding onto God's Word as truth... I'm out of here. Culture is always going to tell you what you want to hear. The good thing about Ted and this church and its leadership, they are always going to tell you what you need to hear and what God's truth says.

The scary thing with music and marketing is they are all going to tell you what you want to hear. "Have it your way." Nike – "Just do it." It's all about you and that's what gets us to a place of anxiety, worry and depression. Dr. Anderson, in his book *Equipped to Counsel*, he talks about depression and anxiety beginning with an internal focus. When we put ourselves on the throne and remove our eyes from an eternal focus and put it on ourselves, that's where it all begins. That's because we make horrible saviors. So, when we look for ourselves to be the ones that have to fix it and save us, it's never going to work.

It goes on to say, **...but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...** They are going to want to suit what they want, what they desire. **4 *...and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.***

So, I ask you. If you come into church every Sunday wanting to hear something for yourself... I hope you walk into church and say, "I want to hear Jesus exalted. I want to walk into church on Sunday and praise him. I don't worry about what I want to hear; I want to hear what I need to hear, which is the truth of God." Here's why all this is so important. **What we listen to and what we look at is what we think about.** So, your eyes and your ears drive your thoughts and it begins to be what we think about.

My wife is not very materialistic at all. She's very non-materialistic. Once in a while, she'll get onto a girl's blog or a girl's Instagram and all the sudden, she's like, "Oh my gosh, I've got to get these shoes."

Then she starts thinking about it. She's like, "No, no, no, it says it's the last day of the sale. This is a steal."

I'm like, "Sweets, I'm sorry, but that's how they get you. Let's see tomorrow if it's the last day of the sale on that Instagram ad too." The next day – it's the last day of the sale. It's kind of like Yakov's last season. I have to give Ted complete credit for that joke. Helps my comedy so much. I didn't use that in the first service, and he gave it to me for the second service.

What we think about matters. Look at Isaiah 26: 3 says. **3 You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.** If you're walking in here this morning and your thoughts and your mind is not at peace, what are you thinking about, what are you looking at, what are you listening to? It says those who set their minds on him, they are going to be at perfect peace. Their minds are going to be in an okay place.

As a matter of fact, Romans 12: 2 is one of my favorite verses. It says, **2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed...** I love that word *transformed*. In the Greek it is metamorphoo, which is where we get the word metamorphosis. We know when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly, it looks completely different. It doesn't act the same; it's a different creation. **...by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.** Of course you're going to be anxious and depressed... I'm not talking about clinical depression today. Ted and the team are all going to attack that in the weeks to come. I'm just talking about self-induced depression, anxiety, worry, or whatever else the holidays may create. It says do not conform to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may discern what God's will is.

How can you have peaceful thoughts when you're not reading from the Prince of Peace? How can anything in this culture... 1 John 5: 19 - **19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.** How can anything in this culture bring you peace of mind when you're not reading from the Prince of Peace? This whole culture is fabricated to make you anxious, worried, depressed, do more, get more, accumulate more, do whatever you need to do to take care of this worry or this pain; medicate more, drink more, whatever it is.

Paul the Apostle knew how important our thoughts were. He knew how important our mind being peaceful is. He says this so many times. He says it here in Romans and then he says it again in Colossians 3: 2 - **2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.** He says it again to the church at Philippi in Philippians 4: 8 - **8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.**

You ask the question: "Is the thought I'm having right now excellent? Nope; it's going to lead me down a dark path." "Is it praiseworthy? Nope; it's going to lead me back to a cycle." "Is it noble? Nope." Paul knows what you think about is so important because it's going to lead you to the rest of the equation I'm to talk to you about.

Here's the crazy thing. I know it's not as simple as telling you to stop thinking about that. We've all been there. The more we try not to think about something, the more we try to think about not harming ourselves or the more we try not to think about an ex or the more we try not to think about worrying about our child; the more we try not to think about something, the reality is trying not to think about it only makes us think about it more. So, it's not like if I sat here and said, "Pink elephant, pink elephant, pink elephant. Hey, there's a big pink elephant that looks like the inside out character behind me, but I want you guys to stop thinking about the pink elephant. Stop." No, most of you are still looking at a funny image behind me known as a pink elephant. So, the answer isn't to stop thinking about something; the answer is to actually replace that thought with something else. So rather than telling someone to just stop thinking about it, tell them to think about something else.

Paul actually says this in 2 Corinthians 10 - **3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.** We don't medicate like the world does. We don't chase after vices like the world does. We're not quick to write scripts. We're not quick to run to the bottle. No, we are quick to run to the Lord. Paul is saying we don't respond the way the world responds. We respond differently. We don't respond by being captured by addiction and other things that we try to satisfy or fill that void. We're different.

4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power... This is divine power from the Lord to give you peace of mind during this season, to give you peace of heart during this season. ...**to demolish strongholds.** They have divine power to demolish any addiction we may have, any thought we might be imprisoned by. He says, **5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.**

So, what is Paul saying? He's saying we exchange our thoughts. We don't not think about something; we think about Jesus, about what Christ has become. And isn't it completely ironic that the very reason we celebrate this season we are currently in is because he has freed us from the bondage this very season brings us into. He came humble in a manger, so you'd be free from the bondage of materialism. He freed you from the bondage of comparison, as you wonder if your Christmas lights are as good as somebody else's. He freed you from the bondage of bitterness as you think about getting together with your in-laws or other family. He freed you from the bondage of alcoholism as you think about drinking extra eggnog because you can't handle the anxiety of having conversations with people in your house. He freed you from the bondage of the very things that we put ourselves in bondage to in this season.

And isn't it crazy... And this might take some of you back. Jesus' birthday is not December 25th. We don't know exactly when it is. The reason we celebrate December 25th is because it was put on in the northern hemisphere three days after the darkest day of the year known as Winter Solstice. December 21st is the darkest day of the year, the shortest and darkest day of the year. And isn't it crazy that three days later, a virgin mother, her husband Joseph would find their way into a manger as humble as can be and the brightest light this world would ever know would come during the darkest months. His light literally pushes back the darkness. He is pushing back the darkness of depression. He is pushing back the darkness of anxiety. He is pushing back the darkness of addiction.

So, in the midst of our darkest season, no leaves on the trees, no sun up that long, here comes the brightest light this world has ever known. Yet we jump into Christmas and sometimes, if we were to admit, he is the very last thing we are thinking about – that light that has freed us from the bondage of the very thing we've been captive to.

You may be thinking, *Oh my gosh, I hope he hurries up with his message, I've got to run to Walmart and get a couple more stocking items. I've got to do a couple more things...* No, this season is about him and the bondage of thinking you need to go get more and do more and be more. This season is about him taking you just as you are as you walked in here today, and there's nothing more you have to do; he did it for you. This season is about him freeing us from the bondage. He came and walked on this earth as a man and lived the life we all should have lived, died the death we all deserve to die so that you and I don't have to taste death. That's what *Christmas* is all about; more of Christ pushing back the darkness, more of Christ pushing back the addiction. And when our thoughts get there it matters.

Now, I'm not good at math and, in school, I never understood why in the world I would need to know $E = mc^2$. I have never used it once in my life. Or the thagram theorem for that matter. No offense to math teachers. I just have never had to use it for anything. But I've come up with an equation that I think is pretty biblical and accurate. As a matter of fact, I hate math so much, I walked into my academic counselor when I was at Boise State as a sophomore; I had changed my major five times. She goes, "What's going on?" I said, "I don't know what I want to do with my life. I just know I hate math. Can you please put me in a major that requires the least amount of math classes?" She said, "Yeah, you're a communication major." Boom! Here I am communicating to all of you today. God has a sense of humor.

Here's why this isn't so important, right? **What we think about is what we care about.** So, as you look at things and you look at ads and you look at all these things and you listen to things, what you think about is what you care about. Luke 12: 34 says, ***34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***

Ted Cunningham has completely ruined my five-year-old. Let me explain. In September, he took him fishing at Dogwood Canyon. You know where I'm going with this. Ted is a phenomenal fisherman. He's very skilled; he knows what he's doing; he knows all the lures; he knows the ties; he knows the right way to cast... He knows all those things. He's been doing this. He's an Ozark natural. I grew up in San Diego; I know nothing of fishing. So, Ted's out there with my five-year-old, yanking out big ol' rainbow trout. They feed them so they think they can bite food all the time. My five-year-old is just hugging that fish and kissing on the slimy, nasty fish. I got pictures of it. He was just so enamored, and he loves fishing.

Ever since we left, he's been begging me to take him fishing. Alright, it was easy for Ted. We've gone fishing three or four times. We even went to a stocked pond. True story. So, Ted promised my little five-year-old that when we get a 50 degree day in December, we'll go back to dogwood. So, all my five-year-old asks me every day is "What's the temperature going to be today?" Over and over because that's all he's thinking about. And all you think about is all you care about.

It's the same with Christmas presents. Anybody that has a toddler knows that this season is crazy. All the sudden the devil has come out in your child. They've been great all the way up until Thanksgiving. Now Christmas is coming, and every teacher said... Amen. It is crazy. All the sudden it's like what in the world have you drank? It's just completely two different children in my house right now. I told my wife, "Baby, we've just got to be patient. There is just so much excitement in them they don't know how to handle it and we're definitely not going to let them run to what a lot of adults run to during this season because it's not healthy for them. So, we're just going to keep loving them and caring on them and let their excitement drive us crazy." That's because all they're thinking about and all they're caring about is opening Christmas gifts on Christmas morning. We keep trying to bring them back to the advent story and we keep trying to explain that to them. Why?

What you think about and what you care about ultimately becomes what we chase. No, my five-year-old is not chasing Jesus right now. He's chasing trout, Hot Wheels, and Legos right now. That's all he can think about from the time he wakes up to the time he goes to bed. And I literally try to shift the conversation to other things, and he'll give me the quick Bible answer and then move right back to Legos. I'm like, *Holy cow, I've got to pray for your sinful, afflicted, paganistic heart, Anders.*

What we think about is what we care about and what we care about is what we chase. What are we chasing? The unknown author of Hebrews said this well quoted passage in Hebrews 12: ***1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight... Not sin, but weight. So, it can just be something that's not even sinful that's not helping us keep our eyes on Jesus. It could be something that's not even known as sin, but it's just not helping us run towards Jesus. ..and sin which clings so closely, and let us run... Let us chase ...with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus...*** There's what drives us again, right?

When you ride a bike fast down a hill, you're not riding looking around, you're not driving a car looking around, you are looking to where you are going and so what you're looking at is inevitably going to make this equation where you end up. Looking to Jesus ***...the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross... Looking to Jesus, running to him. ...despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.***

That verse encapsulates everything I'm talking about all the way back to the very first thing we talked about. What you look at is going to drive where you're going. Because what you look at and what you listen to is going to drive what you're thinking about and whether you have a quiet mind and where you rest in this holiday season.

This is why this is all so important. As those eyes and those ears drive your thoughts and what you think about... What you think about is the most important piece in this entire equation. That's why Paul has so much to say about it. This is where a quiet mind rests or doesn't rest. **What you think about is what you care about, and what you care about is what you chase, and, ultimately, what you chase is what you become.** And as you chase darkness, you will live in the dark. As you chase this world, you will live as the world lives. Or if you chase Jesus, you will live in the light and you will have peace that surpasses all understanding. You will have peace that comes from the Prince of Peace himself.

2 Corinthians 5: 17 says, ***17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ...*** that's anyone, not because they had it all together, not because they fixed themselves. If anyone is in Christ that they understand this Christmas story and the Easter story, ***...he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.***

I'm a basketball coach and I have a team that is literally from all over the country, from Brooklyn, New York, to Sacramento, California, all the way down to Georgia. I have kids from all over that make up our team. Some of them come as non-believers. I'm really intentional with that. We have one kid that comes from The Projects. He was really rough around the edges. I just sensed God was doing something in his heart. This fall, he made a really, really foolish decision. I was trying to make the decision of whether or not I was going to remove this individual from our program, knowing that where I'm sending him back to is not better than where he's at right now, but I'm also not going to condone or enforce bad decisions.

We prayed and we decided to let him stay. A week after we decided to let him stay, I could just sense that the Lord was softening his heart, and he saw grace and forgiveness in his life for the first time. He was in my office and I started walking through the gospel. Within about 15 minutes, he was on his knees, sobbing his eyes out, asking Jesus to come and take control of his life. He surrendered his life to Jesus and has been walking with him ever since. This was about a month and a half ago.

About two weeks after that, I said, "Hey, December is coming upon us. There are 31 days in December; let's read 31 chapters of Proverbs, a proverb a day." He said he didn't have a Bible. I told him I would get him a Bible, but until then he should just pull it up on his Bible app.

About two days into it, he texted me and said, "Coach, I've read Proverbs 1 and 2; I don't understand a word it is saying."

I said, "Alright, what version are you reading?"

He says, "King James."

Keep in mind he's from the hood - ebonic speaking, so King James... I said, "I can get you a version that's going to help you understand the Word a lot better and we can talk about it." So, I got him a more ebonic friendly version of the Bible.

His next response after he read Proverbs 5 was, "Man, Proverbs go hard, Coach." That means it's impacting him, for those of you who don't understand ebonics. *Hard* is a good thing. It's hitting his heart with impact.

This last two weeks, I got the greatest compliments from two staff members that don't interact with my basketball players nearly as much as I do. They said, "Man, that kid is completely different. He countenance is different. His demeanor is different. His teachability is different."

You see when God gets hold of your heart and your mind, you literally and physically and spiritually and inwardly begin to change. You become a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come. So, the most important thing as you stand here today is “Who am I becoming?”

To finish with this verse 1 Corinthians 11: 1 Paul says... He’s not telling you to follow himself; that’s not what he’s saying at all. He’s saying, ***1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*** Once again, as he always did, he’s saying, “Look to Jesus. Become more like Jesus. Don’t follow Paul, follow Jesus.” I’m telling my player the same thing. “Don’t follow coach. Only follow the Jesus I’m following. Don’t follow talk show hosts. Don’t follow your music, follow Jesus, and you become more like Jesus.”

And guess what? The epitome of peace comes from Jesus. So, when we talk about a peace of mind... I know I’m tipping over a sacred cow here. It’s not more prescriptions, it’s not more alcohol, it’s not more affairs, it’s not more voices to fill a heart that’s never satisfied. It’s Jesus. It’s looking to the author and perfecter of our faith, first and foremost, where the peace of mind during the season comes from.

And oh, doesn’t the enemy love that he has us so distracted and dis-attracted from what Christmas is truly all about? He gets our minds where they are not at peace. The author and Prince of Peace says during the season, come to me, all of you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give your rest for your weary souls, for your weary minds, for your weary hearts.

What we think about is what we care about and what we care about is what we chase and what we chase is what we become. So, perhaps, we should all think about Jesus, first and foremost, this holiday season.

Father God, thank you so much for this church, its leadership, its staff, its people, and what you're doing. God, take our thoughts and may we make them captive to you. May you just help us to fixate our minds on you, our hearts on you. May we chase you. May we become more like you.

May we stop today and reflect, not on the shopping we have to do and not the decorations we have to do, and all the check lists we have to check off. May we just reflect that this season is about quiet and peace on earth. Thank you for coming into the lowly manger and living that life you lived for us. We love you.

It’s in the matchless and mighty name of Jesus we pray. And all God’s people said... Amen.