

5. What Child is this? He'll bring Perfect Life - The Prince of Peace

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[0 : 00] But just for a few moments, would you try and listen as we read the Bible together? I'm going to say a few things about this Bible text. You know where it is by now, it's Isaiah chapter 9. I'm not sure what page that is on our church Bible.

Somebody can sing out, but it's quite near the middle of the Bibles. Anyone got a page number for the church Bible? 573 in our church Bibles, if you have one of those.

It's very familiar. We've been looking at this passage now for several of our services. I'm going to read part of it, beginning at verse 1. And he's speaking, if you look at the end of the previous chapter, to people in distress and darkness, in the gloom of anguish, in thick darkness.

But, says Isaiah, there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali.

But, in the latter time, he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

[1 : 10] Those who dwell in the land of deep darkness, or as some versions have it, in the land of the shadow of death, on them has the light shined. Look down to verse 6.

Verse 6. For unto us a child is born. To us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Just keep your Bible open there. We've been looking in these days at these wonderful names given to the child who would be born.

We're at the last one this morning. He shall be called the Prince of Peace. What does that mean? That means that he will be the bringer of perfect life.

[2 : 22] Possibly peace is the word that above all is associated with Christmas, isn't it? The season of peace and goodwill is the kind of thing that, well, we hear it bandied about everywhere at Christmas, don't we?

Peace to all men and so on. Well, I expect there probably hasn't been a great deal of peace in our household this morning. Certainly in those of us with children. More like complete chaos and hyperactivity and excitement.

Certainly not peace. And I wonder how much peace and harmony will remain at the end of a few days of all of our extended family gatherings. That's another interesting thing, isn't it?

At Christmas. Certainly there's not an awful lot of sign of peace in our world today, is there? No newspapers today, but when we read the papers tomorrow, we'll be seeing a world in which peace seems very fragile and momentary, if it does break out.

Rather like, do you remember the story of the trenches in World War I, when on Christmas Day, for a little while the British soldiers and the German soldiers put down their guns and went out into no man's land and played football and exchanged greetings and cards and so on.

[3 : 34] But of course within a few hours they were back in the trenches and shooting to kill one another, weren't they? And yet in a very real sense, Christmas is all about a message of peace.

And that's the final name of this child that Isaiah said Christmas was to be all about. When he spoke about him, think about this, 700 years before Jesus was born. His name, he said, shall be called the Prince of Peace.

But what does that mean? Well, in between our carols this morning, and we are going to sing more, I want to think just for a few minutes about what this name really does mean.

It's a vast subject. We could spend days and days, actually, immersed in the wonders of it. We won't do that. I know your turkeys are in the oven. We don't want to burn them. But it would be good, wouldn't it, to make sure that we do find some time around the Christmas period, to ponder in our minds, as Mary did, as we sang, the real meaning of the Christmas message.

But I want to summarize our thoughts about Jesus as the Prince of Peace, using three things that Paul very specifically says in the second chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, speaking about the peace that Jesus brings.

[4 : 48] First of all, Paul says he himself is our peace. That's what Paul says in Ephesians 2.14. He himself is our peace, who has made us both one, that is, Jews and Gentiles, and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

This child, Jesus Christ, says Paul is our peace. Peace is his name. And it's his nature. And therefore, that's why Isaiah says his reign will be a reign of peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. Now, this peace that we're speaking about consists of something negative and something positive.

It is the cessation of hostilities, completely in every way, on the international level. That's why Isaiah says, swords will be beaten into plowshares when his peace finally comes.

It's true on a family level, on a personal level, in our relationships, there will be peace. There will be peace in every single troubled mind and troubled heart.

[6 : 03] There will be the absence, totally, of turmoil, of hostility and of fear. When the peace that this child came to bring comes fully. But it's more than just negative, it's also positive.

You'll know that that Hebrew word, peace, shalom, means much more than just the negative. It means wholeness and roundedness and completeness and contentment and joy.

It's the life of peace that is the perfect life. Now, you might say, well, that's all wonderful, but it's just wishful thinking.

That's living in la-la land, isn't it? But listen, that is, if we take him seriously, exactly what the prophet Isaiah is speaking about. Listen to what he says in chapter 55 about the days of the reign of this one to come.

You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace. And the mountains and the hills before you will break forth into singing. And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

[7 : 11] Behold, says the Lord, I will extend peace like a river. It's a picture, isn't it, of perfection. Of a joyous life, of the perfect life.

Of the desert rejoicing and blossoming like a crocus. That's what Isaiah speaks of. Of the lame leaping. Of the blind seeing. Of the deaf hearing.

You read through Isaiah's prophecy, you just can't miss that he is painting us a picture of the perfect life. A perfect life in a perfect world. The whole of nature at harmony.

With the curse dispersed, as we've just sung. Life as you imagine that it could be and even should be. But of course it isn't. But it isn't, as the Bible tells us, because of human sin and rebellion against God.

And because of the curse that has bound this whole world since the days of Eden. But, says the Apostle Paul, you see the Christmas message tells us that he himself is our peace.

[8 : 15] Jesus is the Prince of Peace. And where he is, well there, perfect peace is to be found. It breaks out. That's what we find if you read through the Gospels.

Just pick any of them. Matthew or Mark or Luke or John. In his presence, peace and perfection breaks out. So the lame walk in the presence of Jesus.

And the blind see. And the deaf hear. The storms on the sea are immediately calmed when he says to them, peace, be still.

The hungry are fed and the distressed and the demonized are calmed and brought to peace. You see, all of that is a foretaste of what his permanent presence in the world will bring forever when he returns to reign.

He came to bring real peace. And when Isaiah saw and prophesied these things 700 years before the birth of Jesus from such a distance, of course, he saw it all as one great event.

[9 : 23] The day of the Lord that everyone was looking forward to. But when Jesus came, he himself explained that his kingdom would come in final power and glory, in final peace, only when

his Gospel has reached every nation.

And when he had at last gathered in the people of every tribe and language and people and nation that he's calling to himself. Only then, on that day, will he return and bring in forever this kingdom of peace.

But you see, that day is sure and certain in the future. Just as sure and certain as the day of his birth is in the past and marks all our calendars. And the one appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ definitely guarantees his coming back.

He came to guarantee the perfect life, his peace, his shalom. And when he comes again, as the psalmist says, peace will abound till the moon shall be no more.

That means forever and ever. Of the increase of his government and of peace, there shall be no end. Because he is our peace.

[10:35] And where he is, there is peace. And the perfect life forever. And so still the days are hastening on by prophet bards foretold.

Towards the fullness of their time, when comes the age foretold. Then earth and heaven, renewed, shall see the prince of peace, their king.

And all the world repeat the joy, which now the angels sing. Jesus Christ is himself our peace, says Paul.

But then he goes on to say a second thing. He came to make peace. He says he came that he might reconcile us both, that is Jews and Gentiles, to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

Now what Paul is talking about there, in his letter to the Ephesians, is what God has done to unite, in peace and in reconciliation, bitter warring enemies in this world, Jews and Gentiles, by uniting them together with Jesus Christ, who himself is the only source, of true reconciliation and peace, between human beings.

[11:52] What he's saying is that, the true reconciliation that leads to peace, among human beings, begins, begins, with the reconciliation and peace, that we have with God himself.

You see, the root, of every division, and, of all hostility and bitterness, in our world, is the self-righteousness, in the human heart.

Let's think about it. See, if there's a grudge, that we have, because we feel hard done to, that's how we often feel, isn't it? Somebody does something to us, and we feel a grudge.

We sense somebody's wronged us. And we feel superior, and we feel, that we're in the right, and they're in the wrong. And that grudge, and that resentment, builds up, and it destroys, doesn't it, our peace, the harmony, of our relationship, with that other person.

There can be anger, resentment, that builds up. And it may simmer on, and simmer, until we, until we act, in some sort of way, of retaliation, some sort of dispute.

[13:02] That's how, un-peace, disharmony, builds up, isn't it? In a marriage, for example, or a, a love relationship.

In a work situation, that's what builds up, isn't it? It's a simmering grudge, and resentment, and a feeling of superiority. So you get action, like we're going to have next week, with the strikes, in the airports.

Or like we're reading about, just now, with the police, down in England, and the Home Secretary. It's the same on national scales, on international scales. Just think about the disputes, over land, in our world.

Bosnia's, back in the newspapers again, isn't it? The dispute there, between the land, between the Bosnians, and the Serbs. Or think of Palestine, think of Ireland. In many, many other places. At the root, of every one of these disputes, between human beings, is ultimately, self-righteousness.

We justify, our own stand, and our own position, and we judge, the position of our opponent, as wrong. And of course, so do our opponents, in the opposite direction, to us.

[14:10] None of us will admit, that we are at fault, and that our opponent, may have a point. None of us will admit, that we are in error, that we should, perhaps, surrender.

And that's why, there can be no peace. But you see, when Jesus came, to make peace, between us, and God, he did it, in a way, that absolutely, destroys, any possibility, of self-righteousness, for us.

Isn't that right? Paul says, to the Ephesians, it's by grace, we've been saved, through faith, not, of our own doing, not that we should boast, but by God's gift, not a result of works, so that no man,

can boast.

That's, something that kills, self-righteousness, isn't it? That we're brought, near to God, only, only, by the precious blood, of Jesus Christ, not by anything, at all, in us.

What could be, more humbling, than that? There's only one thing, that's harder, isn't there, than to forgive, somebody else. That's to, that's to receive, their forgiveness.

[15 : 21] Isn't that right? Because, you see, to receive, forgiveness, from somebody, is to be truly humbled, isn't it? It's to know, that we can't, right a wrong, by ourself.

We can't, set something right. All we can do, is receive, from the person, that we have wronged, their gracious, forgiveness. Something, that costs them, an awful lot, in their hearts, to give to us. It's very hard, isn't it? It's very, very hard, to receive something, we know we don't deserve. To receive something, that crushes our pride, that forces us, to admit, we are in the wrong. But Jesus, came to make, peace, for us.

And to do, what we could, never ever do. And it cost him, everything. That's why, Isaiah the prophet, says, upon him, was the chastisement, that brought, our peace.

And only, because of that, can the Lord, go on to say, my steadfast love, therefore, will never depart, from you. And my covenant, of peace, shall not be removed. Only, because of the chastisement, and the punishment, on our saviour, Jesus Christ.

[16 : 39] Can he say that? It's very humbling, isn't it, for us? You see, when we understand, what it means, for Jesus Christ, to make peace, with God, by the blood, of his cross.

When we understand, what it means, when Jesus said, as he took the bread, and the cup, and said, this, is the blood, of the covenant, which is poured out, for many, for the forgiveness, of sins. And we understand, that it's very, very hard, to be self-righteous, anymore, isn't it? It's very hard, for us to have, an attitude, in our heart, that would say, I'll never, ever forgive that person, for doing that to me.

I'll never be at peace, with that person, until they apologize. Very hard, for us to say that, isn't it?

When we understand, the reconciliation, with God, that we have, that the peace, with God, that we have, comes to us, in a way, that totally humbles us.

We realize, it's not just, that we can't be, what we need to be, but we recognize, that we must be, reconciled, to our brothers, and our sisters, whatever it costs us.

[17 : 56] Because we're humbled, by the grace, and the mercy, of the one, who reconciled us, to God, who, gave us peace, that we might receive it. He came, says Paul, to make peace, peace with God, for us, and therefore, through hearts, humbled by grace, to make peace, among us, who know what it means, to have been reconciled, by the mercy of God.

Now just, just for a moment, imagine a world, where every single person, knows, the humbling grace of God, in that way. Where, every single person, therefore, is a humbled, and a humble peacemaker.

It'd be a perfect world, wouldn't it? And that is, the perfect life, that Jesus Christ, will usher in, at his return. When all, his enemies, are at last banished, and only those, who are humbled, and reconciled, by his grace, where only they remain.

And then, and only then, as Isaiah says, they shall not hurt, or destroy, in all my holy mountain, for the earth, shall be full, of the knowledge of God, as the waters, cover the sea.

Because he came, to make peace. To humble, proud rebels, to reconcile them, to God, by his mercy, and his grace. He came, to make peace.

[19 : 31] Well, he's the prince of peace. He is our peace. He came, to make peace. But here's a question. How can that peace, be mine? How can what Jesus did, become real for me, in my life?

How can it become real, for us today? In the same way, it became real, for his followers, who saw him, and touched him, and heard his voice. Well, in Ephesians chapter 2, Paul tells us, one more thing, about his peace.

He comes, says Paul, to make, to preach, peace. Listen to verse 17, of Ephesians 2. He says, and he came, and preached peace, to you, who were far off.

That's the Gentiles. And peace, to you, who were near. That's the Jews. For through him, we both, have access, in one spirit, to the Father. I wonder, if you noticed, something surprising, in that verse.

Paul said, he came, and preached peace, to you. That is, he said, Jesus Christ himself, came, and proclaimed his peace, to the Ephesians, in Ephesus, who had become, Christian believers.

[20 : 48] But of course, Jesus Christ, had never been in the flesh, to Ephesus. He never was outside, Palestine, well, except, for a brief period, as a baby, when he fled to Egypt.

And he descended, to heaven, hadn't he, long before, any of those people, that Paul was writing to, had heard the name Jesus. How could Jesus, have gone, and preached peace, to them?

How could he have, imparted, his own peace, to them directly? We can understand, how Jesus, could do that, to his disciples. In the upper room, just before he went, to the cross, he said to them, peace, I leave with you.

My peace, I give to you. And we can understand that. After his resurrection, when he met them again, he said to them, peace be with you. And do you remember, he breathed on them, and said, receive the Holy Spirit.

We can understand, how the person of Jesus, can speak, and proclaim his peace, to people. But how on earth, could Jesus, pronounce his peace, to people in Ephesus, in A.D. 55 or so?

[21 : 57] Or for that matter, in Glasgow, in A.D. 2007? Well, of course, what Paul means, when he says, that Jesus himself, came and preached peace, is that he did exactly that, in his person.

But he did it, when Paul came, and preached, the truth of the gospel, to those people. When the good news of peace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, is preached, and proclaimed, then the Prince of Peace, himself, who has all authority, in heaven and earth, he comes, to bestow his peace, in person, on men and women, and boys and girls.

He is speaking to them, everywhere the gospel, is proclaimed. And he comes, and he brings, peace, and real reconciliation, through the reception, of that message, with God his Father.

He is a king, who sends ambassadors. And when a king, sends an ambassador, the ambassador, carries all the full authority, of the crown. He acts, as though it were the king, or the queen.

And Peter, in Acts chapter 5, says of the ascended Lord, he says, God has exalted him, as Prince, and Savior, to give repentance, and forgiveness of sins.

[23 : 18] He says, he gives his Holy Spirit, to all, who obey him, when they hear the message, of the gospel. That is, every single one, who humbles himself, and who receives, the forgiveness, that only Jesus Christ, the Prince, and Savior, can give.

So that we can have, peace with God. The peace that we can't have, any other way. He came, and preached peace, says Paul.

To those ordinary people, living in Ephesus, all those years ago. And as Paul proclaimed, the good news of Jesus Christ, Jesus himself, spoke directly, to their hearts, and granted them, forgiveness, and repentance, and peace, and reconciliation, with God.

With all, power and authority, he did that. And friends, the message of the gospel, is that with all, power and authority, Jesus Christ, the Prince, and Savior, still does that.

He comes, to preach, to proclaim peace, to offer peace, to all who will hear, and receive that, gracious message. That's why, one of our favorite carols, or little town of Bethlehem, says this, where meek souls, will receive him, still, still, the dear Christ, enters in.

[24 : 40] Not proud souls though, that's important. Because, self-righteousness, is the one thing, that bars, the door, to the Prince of Peace.

But it's the only thing, the only thing, ever, that bars that door. Because to the meek, to the humble, to those who know, their own hearts, to everyone, who feels the shame, of their own failures, who's conscious, of the sorrow, of their own lack, of integrity, the mess ups, in their life, the disappointments, everything that they're not, that they want to be, to them, and to every one of them, Isaiah's words, ring so wonderfully true, don't they?

How beautiful, on the mountains, are the feet, of him, who brings good news, who publishes, peace, who brings, good news, of happiness, who says to Zion, and your God, reigns.

To every, honest, humble, meek heart, that brings joy, because they know, that whatever, the good news is, wherever it's heard, he, the Prince of Peace himself, comes, even now, to proclaim his peace, to everyone, who will hear, and receive.

He comes, to assure, every one of our hearts, fearful, as they often are, he assures us, about the future, forever, through everything, that he has accomplished, for us, by making peace, through the blood, of his cross.

[26 : 25] Yes, it's true, Isaiah tells us, that on that day, the great day, when Christ comes again, and his kingdom, is ushered in, on that day, he will extend to us, peace, like a river.

At last, the perfect life, of his kingdom, of peace, will know no end, and peace, will fill the world, as the waters, cover the sea, but even now, today, wherever that good news, is spoken, and heard, he draws near, the Prince, and the Saviour, and he whispers, again, that peace, into our hearts, however anxious, however fearful, however sorrowful, they may be, the peace, that was imparted, remember to old Simeon, do you remember, octogenarian Simeon, in the temple, when he met, Mary and Joseph, and he saw, the infant Jesus, and in him, he saw, God's salvation, for the whole world, remember what he said, now Lord, you're letting, your servant, depart, in, peace, total contentment, with life, and total calmness, about death, because he had received, God's word of peace, in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, and friends, that's the message, of Christmas, Jesus Christ, is the Prince of Peace, he is our peace, in him alone, is the way, to that perfect life, in the eternal kingdom, of his peace, that he brings, peace, he has made peace, through the blood, of his cross, to destroy, all self-righteousness, in every person, there is, but to fill, the humble, with joy, and with gladness, at forgiveness, and reconciliation, with God, and he preaches peace, still today, to every one of us, everyone who will hear, and obey, the Prince, and the Savior, and as Isaiah, promises to everyone, who hears, and obeys, and bows the knee, to the Prince of Peace, you will keep him, he says, in perfect peace, whose mind, has stayed on you, because, he trusts in you, so hail, the heaven-born, Prince of Peace, hail, the Son of Righteousness, light, and life, to all he brings, risen, with healing, in his wings, things, that's the message, of Christmas, about the one, who is, the Prince of Peace, 66, of Peace, and peace, in heaven.

Thank you, we're on Monday, through the new season, who shows us, thatogriified, and overhead, we'll be at, everything, away, and with our ears,