

The True Life of All Who Receive Him-Prince of Peace

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[0 : 00] Well, if you have a Bible, you might like to turn with me. We're going to read this morning for one last time in Isaiah chapter 9 in this famous passage that we've been looking at together in our different carol services, and very especially at the great names given to this promised child who would come in verse 6.

I'm going to read just briefly verses 1 and 2, and then verses 6 and 7 of Isaiah chapter 9 in the face of the gloom and the anguish and the thick darkness that ends chapter 8, God says through his prophet, but 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.

Those who dwelled in a land of deep darkness, on them has the light shined. 4 verse 6, unto us a child is born, unto 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 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.

[1 : 43] And the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Amen. May God bless to us his word. His name will be called the Prince of Peace.

Perhaps peace is the word that we associate most of all with Christmas. And we talk about the season of peace and goodwill. That's the kind of thing that's bandied about all over the place, isn't it?

Peace, goodwill, peace to all men. Well, you're not supposed to say men these days, are you? It's supposed to be, I suppose, peace to all people or all humankind or something like that. Or just peace to all.

But I bet there wasn't much peace around in your homes this morning, especially if young children were involved. I wonder what time some of you are up this morning. Perhaps a little bit earlier than usual, I suspect.

Perfect. Plenty of hyperactivity and all sorts of excitement. That's before all the chocolate Santas are going to be eaten this afternoon. So just wait. But I wonder how much peace and harmony will remain after all these extended family gatherings over the next few days and weeks as well.

[2 : 51] When the in-laws turn into the outlaws and everybody starts to get on everybody's nerves. It's quite ironic in a way that Christmas is the season of peace. Certainly, though, there's not an awful lot of sign of peace around in our world, is there?

Even this Christmas time. Peace as fragile and momentary as it is. It was seen, wasn't it, just for those few brief moments, famously in the middle of the First World War when the Allied forces and the German forces came out of the trenches and played that famous game of football.

But by the next day, they were back to shooting at each other, weren't they? And yet, in a very real sense, Christmas is a message of peace.

And that's why the final name given to this child who was to be born by Isaiah is the Prince of Peace. He's talking about peace. He's talking about real peace. And that will define who this child would be and what he would do.

What does that mean? Well, in between our carols this morning, I want us to think just for a few minutes about this. It's a vast subject. We could spend days and days, let alone hours, thinking about it.

[4 : 01] But we won't. I know your turkeys are in the oven and we don't want them to be spoiled. But it would be good, wouldn't it, in amongst all the feasting, in amongst all the excitement, to find, like Mary, some time to ponder in our minds the real meaning of the Christmas message.

I want to summarize our thoughts about Jesus as the Prince of Peace using three things that Christ's Apostle, the Apostle Paul, says in Ephesians 2. If you want to turn up your Bibles, it's page 976.

The verse there is on our screen. First thing is this, that Paul says that he, Jesus Christ, he himself is our peace. He himself is our peace who has made us both one, that is Jews and Gentiles, he's speaking about there, and has broken down in his flesh this dividing wall of hostility.

This child, Jesus Christ, when we celebrate at Christmas, is our peace. Peace is his name and peace is his nature, is what Paul is saying.

And that's why Isaiah says that his reign will be a reign of peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. This peace that we're speaking about, it consists really of something negative and something positive.

[5 : 25] It is the absence, the cessation of all hostility, completely in every way. On the international scene, Isaiah says, swords will be beaten into plowshares.

But also on the family level, on the personal level, it will mean peace in all our relationships. Peace in every troubled mind, in every troubled heart.

The absence of turmoil, of hostility, of fear. But it's more than just that negative thing, it's a positive thing. The Hebrew word peace, shalom, it means more than that.

It means wholeness, it means roundedness, it means completeness, it means contentment and joy. The life of peace in the Bible really means the life that is perfect, true life.

Life as human life is meant to be. You might say, well, that's just wishful thinking, that's la-la land. That is what the prophet Isaiah, all through his great prophecy, 66 chapters, that's what he was talking about.

[6 : 32] Listen to what he says. About the day when the rain of this prince of peace would come. You will go out with 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 even will clap their hands. Behold, says the Lord, I will extend peace like a river flowing everywhere.

And it will be a picture of perfection, of true life, of joyous life, of perfect life. Read his words and you'll see that's what he says. The desert rejoicing, blooming like the crocus or like the rose.

The lame leaping, the blind seeing, the deaf hearing at last. You can't miss in Isaiah's prophecy that what he is talking about is the perfect life in the perfect world.

That is what this promised one was going to bring. True life. As you can imagine that it could be and that it should be, but it isn't. And the Bible tells us that it isn't as it should be like that because of human sin, because of humankind's rebellion against God, because of the curse that has bound this world since the very beginning of man's rebellion.

[7 : 51] But the Apostle Paul says Jesus Christ is our peace. He's the Prince of Peace. And where he is, that perfect life is to be found.

That true life as God created it to be. If you read the Gospels in the New Testament, that is exactly what you see. Where Jesus is present, peace, life, true life breaks out everywhere.

The lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear. Storms cease when he stands in a boat and says, peace, be still. The hungry are fed.

The distressed, the demonized are brought into calmness, into peace and into their right minds. But all of that, you see, is but a foretaste of what he in his permanent presence will bring to this world forever when he returns to reign.

Because he comes to bring real peace. Now when Isaiah saw all these things, when he prophesied these things from a distance, 700 years and more before the coming of Jesus, he saw it all as part of one great event.

[9 : 06] They called it the day of the Lord, the great day, the day that is coming, as the prophets spoke. But when Jesus came, he himself explained that his kingdom would only come in its final power and glory and great peace.

Only when the good news of his salvation has reached all nations and all peoples. And when he's gathered in at last all of those that he is bringing into his eternal family, people of every tribe and tongue and language and nation.

And then he shall return to bring his peace. But you see, that day is as sure and certain in the future as the day of his birth is sure and certain in the past.

And his one appearance at that first Christmas guarantees absolutely his coming again. He came to guarantee the perfect life, his peace, his shalom to this world.

And when he comes again, as the psalm says, peace will abound till the moon be no more. That is forever. Of the increase of his government and of peace, says Isaiah, there will be no end.

[10 : 19] He is our peace. And where he is, there is peace. True life forever. And so, as the carol says, 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. Well, Jesus Christ is himself our peace, says the apostle.

But he goes on to say there in Ephesians chapter 2 that he also came to make peace. He came to make peace that he might reconcile us both, that is Jews and Gentiles, to God in one body through the cross and thereby killing the hostility.

Now, what Paul is talking about there to the Ephesian church is what God has done to unite in peace and in reconciliation all the bitter warring enemies in this world.

[11 : 29] And he's done that by uniting them together with Jesus Christ, who is himself the only source of true reconciliation, the only source of true peace.

And what he's saying is that the true reconciliation that leads to peace among human beings begins with a true reconciliation between human beings and God himself.

And that is what Jesus came to do. Because, you see, the root of all division, of all bitterness, of all hostility in this world, the root of all of that is something that lies in here, in the human heart.

And in the self-righteousness in the human heart. Let's think about it. You bear a grudge against somebody because you feel hard done to, don't you? Somebody's wronged us and we feel like that.

We feel ourselves superior. We feel that we're in the right. And therefore, that feeling against them destroys our peace. And there's anger often, isn't there?

[12 : 33] There's resentment. And often that simmers and simmers in our hearts. And eventually we act. We say things or we do things. And it results in dispute and breakdown and loss of peace.

That's how marriage relationship begins to fall apart, isn't it? That's how things fall apart and become disputes in the work situation. The trains are on strike again.

The Ryanair pilots are on strike again. Next week it'll be somebody else. There's ongoing strife, isn't there? In the world of work and in business. You see it the same in the national scale.

On the international scale, it's how it happens. Think of the land disputes all over the world that are centuries old. Think about Palestine, Ireland. Nowadays it's Catalonia.

Or it's the Crimea. Or just think of all the strife, all the disharmony that there is every single day in the papers over this Brexit business. And at the root of that is self-righteousness.

[13 : 36] We justify our stand and our position. And we judge the other stand and the other position wrong. And our opponents do exactly the same. And that's what leads to disruption, to disharmony, to the destruction of peace.

No one will admit that they are at fault, that they are in the wrong. And no one will admit that they must give ground or ever surrender. And so there's no peace.

But you see when Jesus came to make peace for us all with God, He destroyed every possibility for self-righteousness in our hearts.

Because Paul says there also in Ephesians 2, verse 8, he says, It's by grace that you've been saved. Not by your own doing, but solely by God's gift.

Not as a result of our works, by what we've done, so that nobody can boast. Nobody can say, I did this. That kills all our self-righteousness in our hearts, doesn't it?

[14 : 41] What can be more humbling than that? To know that we couldn't do anything to sort the situation out. It all had to be done for us by somebody else. I think probably there's only one thing that we find harder than to forgive somebody.

And that's to receive forgiveness. Because to receive forgiveness means to be truly humble, doesn't it? It's to know that you can't yourself undo the situation.

You can't undo the wrong. You can't set it right. All you can do is receive forgiveness from the person that you have wronged. Something that is of their sheer grace.

Something that's costly to them. Hard for them to do. In their effort, it's very hard for us to receive it. Hard to receive something that we know that we don't deserve.

And it humbles us. And human beings like us, we hate being humbled like that, don't we? But Jesus came to make peace for us. Something that we could never do for ourselves with God.

[15 : 47] But something that only he could do. And something that cost him infinitely. In order to be able to give us that peace. That's why the prophet Isaiah said, prophesying all those used before.

That upon him will be the chastisement, the punishment. That brought us peace. And it's only because of that that the Lord can say through the prophet, Therefore, my steadfast love will never depart from you.

And my covenant of peace shall never be removed. Because he alone has done it. And we could only receive it.

It's very humbling, isn't it? When we understand what it means for Jesus Christ to make peace with God. By, as the apostle says, by the blood of his cross alone.

And when we've understood that, what it means when Jesus says, This is the blood, my blood of the covenant. Which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

[16 : 54] When you really understand what that means. It becomes very, very, very hard to be self-righteous. It becomes very hard to say, Well, I'll never forgive that person for what they've done to me.

I'll never have peace with that person or with those people ever again. Because when we realize what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, We just can't be like that, can we, towards our fellow Christians.

We recognize that we must be reconciled to them. And it costs us, but we're humbled by the grace, by the mercy of God, Who has reconciled us to him and made peace in a way that we could never, ever do.

He came to make peace, to make peace with God for us. And therefore, for our hearts to be humbled by that grace. So that there will be peace among us.

Among those of us who know what it means to be reconciled by the sheer grace and mercy of God. Now just imagine for a moment, imagine a world where every single person knows The extraordinarily humbling grace of God in that way.

[18 : 07] And therefore, because they know that, must themselves constantly be a peacemaker with others. That is the perfect world, isn't it?

That is the true life. And that is the life that Jesus Christ has said he will usher in when he returns. When all enemies of peace at last are banished. And when only those who are humbled and who are reconciled by his grace walk this earth.

And then, you see, Isaiah says, Then they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. Because the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.

All because he came to make peace. To humble proud rebels. And to reconcile us to God by his sheer grace and mercy.

Well, he is the prince of peace. He is our peace. And he comes to make peace. But here's the final question. How can that peace be mine?

[19 : 16] How can what Jesus did be real for me in my life? How can it become real in the lives of all of his followers?

Well, Ephesians chapter 2 tells us one more thing. Paul tells us that Jesus comes to preach peace. He says, He came and preached peace to you who were far off.

That is, these Gentile pagan Ephesian people. And to preach peace to you who are near. For through him we both have access by one spirit.

To the Father. I wonder if you notice something surprising in that verse. Paul says to these Ephesians. He came and preached peace to you.

That is, he's saying Jesus himself came. And proclaimed his peace to these pagan Ephesians. Who have become Christian believers. How did that happen?

[20 : 18] Because Jesus Christ in the flesh had never been to Ephesus. He descended to heaven to the right hand of the Father. Long before any of these Ephesians had ever heard about him in about AD 55.

So how could Jesus have preached peace to them? How could he have gone to them and imparted his peace to them? Well, we can understand, can't we, how Jesus could give his peace to his own disciples after he rose from the dead.

After they saw him. Before he went to the cross, remember, he said to them, peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. He said that to them in the upper room.

And then again after his resurrection. Do you remember John tells us how he said, peace be unto you. And Jesus breathed upon them and said, receive my spirit. So we can understand how Jesus personally preached his peace to those very first disciples.

But how did Jesus possibly preach, proclaim, impart his peace in Ephesus, modern day Turkey in AD 55? And how can he possibly do that here in Glasgow in AD 2017?

[21 : 34] Well, of course, what Paul means is that Jesus Christ himself came and personally preached peace to those Ephesians as Paul came and preached to them the truth of the gospel of salvation.

When the good news of peace through Jesus Christ is proclaimed, then the Prince of Peace, who has all the authority in heaven and on earth, himself is speaking to people and has the power to bestow that peace upon them.

And he himself comes and brings that peace and reconciliation through the reception of that message because he has made his people ambassadors of his message.

And the ambassador has the full power and authority to enact the will of their sovereign. And Peter says of the ascended Lord Jesus in Acts chapter 5, God has exalted him as Prince and Savior to give repentance, to give forgiveness of sins.

He says he gives his Holy Spirit to all who obey him, that is, who humble themselves and receive the message of the gospel, the message of forgiveness, so that they can have that peace with God.

[22 : 57] He came and preached peace to those ordinary people in Ephesus all those years ago when Paul proclaimed the good news of the gospel of Christ. And he himself, when that happens, comes with all his power and authority by his Holy Spirit and preaches peace directly to the hearts of everyone who hears and responds to that message.

That's what the carol says, the little town of Bethlehem, where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in, enters in to those hearts and lives of those who receive his message.

Meek souls. Not proud souls, mind you. Because that self-righteousness is the thing that bars the door to the Prince of Peace.

But it is the only thing that can bar the door to the Prince of Peace. To the meek, to the humble, to those who know their own hearts and feel the shame of their own failures, who feel the sorrow about their own lack of integrity and lack of peace.

To people like that, Isaiah's words ring wonderfully true. How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who publish peace, who bring good news of happiness, who say to Zion, your God reigns.

[24 : 22] Because you see, people who know their need and know that, they know that wherever the good news is heard, he, the Prince of Peace himself, comes even now to preach peace and to assure our fearful hearts that we have a future forever.

Because he has made peace and will lead us into his glorious kingdom of peace. And yes, on that day, he will enter, he will open up his kingdom, he will usher in a peace that is utterly like a river, flooding this world in every place with the true life, with the perfect life of his kingdom.

And that will know no end. But even now, today, every day, where the good news of Jesus is spoken and heard, he himself draws near and he comes to us and he whispers again to anxious hearts, to needy hearts, to fearful hearts, he whispers his glorious message of peace.

That was the peace that old Simeon received, you remember, in the temple when he saw the infant Jesus and held him in his arms. And he saw the salvation of God in the flesh and he said, now, Lord, you are letting your servant depart in peace for I have seen your salvation.

And yet, that old man found total contentment with his life and total calmness as he faced death because he had received God's word of peace, God's promise of peace in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 55] And friends, that is the message of Christmas. As someone has put it, peace is a princely gift and it is ours in the gift of God's Son. Christmas is the time which reminds us of the great glad day for which the whole creation waits with eager longing.

It's not only a foretaste but a pledge of what one day will be. A harbinger of something that still lies in the future. Just as the snowdrop is a harbinger of spring telling us, as C.S. Lewis puts it, that we have turned the corner of the year.

They prophesy, even if further snowstorms come, and they often do, they prophesy the signs of coming spring and they've been seen in their blooming. We are still living in the frosts and the cold east winds of the old order and what a bitter winter it proves to be.

But the everlasting spring of God's love and grace is on the way and Christmas is His gracious foretaste and reminder that we do not hope in vain.

Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. He has come and He is the true life of all who will receive Him. He is our peace.

[27 : 10] In Him alone is the way to true life and to the eternal life of His peace. He has made peace through the blood of His cross. And all self-righteousness is destroyed as our hearts are filled with humility and the joy and the wonder of forgiveness and reconciliation.

And He proclaims peace still today to everyone who will heed Him where meek souls will receive Him. And still the dear Christ enters in to possess our hearts and to promise a glorious future.

As Isaiah promised you will keep Him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because He trusts in you. 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. an