

Prince of Peace: He is our Peace

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[0 : 00] We're reading this morning once again from the prophet Isaiah and from chapter 9. For the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For every boot of the trampling warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be bound as fuel for the fire. For to 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 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. His name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

[1 : 38] And I guess peace may be the word, perhaps above all, associated with Christmas. It is the season after all of peace and goodwill to all men.

Probably not supposed to say that today. All humankind, I suppose, the thought police would tell us. But peace. I'm not sure I remember an awful lot of that on Christmas morning when our kids were young.

And judging by the buzz this morning, I don't think too many of you experienced that either. I see a few heads shaking there. Not sure what time. Some of you are up this morning. And I wonder how much peace and harmony will remain in a few days' time after all the family get-togethers and so on over Christmas.

That's another question. And certainly, there is not a lot of sign of peace in our world today, is there? Peace seems as fragile and momentary as it was, well, in the trenches of World War I. Remember when, on Christmas Day, the Allied and the German soldiers came out of the trenches for a few hours and played football together. And then on Boxing Day, went back to shooting one another.

[2 : 46] And yet, in a very real sense, Christmas is all about a message of peace. Real peace. And peace forever. That's the final name of this child that Isaiah said Christmas was to be all about.

When, as we read, he was speaking of him some 700 years and more before the birth of Jesus. His name will be called the Prince of Peace. And that is peace.

Real peace will define who he is and what he will do. But what does that mean? Well, in between our carols this morning, I want to think just for a few minutes about this.

It's a vast subject. We could spend days and days talking about it. We won't. I know your turkeys are waiting. But it would be good. And let me urge you, during some of this Christmas season, to make sure that we do have time to ponder with our minds, as Mary did, the message of Christmas. I want to summarize our thoughts about Jesus, the Prince of Peace, using three things that the Apostle Paul in the New Testament says, speaking to the church in Ephesus, in Ephesians chapter 2, in speaking about what this peace really means.

[3 : 57] First of all, he says of Jesus that he himself is our peace. He himself is our peace, he says, who has made us both one.

That both there is Jews and Gentiles. He has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. This child, Jesus Christ, is our peace.

Peace is his name, and peace is his nature. And that's why Isaiah says, therefore, 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 he's speaking of, it consists of something negative and something positive. It is, negatively, it is the cessation of all hostilities, completely, in every way.

On the international level, Isaiah says, swords will be broken and beaten into plowshares. But it's also true on the family level, on the personal level.

[5 : 03] There will be peace in all relationships, in mind and heart. The absence of turmoil, the absence of hostility, the absence of fear.

But it's more than just something negative, because it's also supremely positive. In fact, the Hebrew word for peace, shalom, it means wholeness.

It means completeness, roundedness, contentment, joy. The life of peace is the perfect life. It's true life.

It's human life as human life was meant to be. Now, you might just say to yourself, well, that's all wishful thinking. That's la-la land. But no, that is what the prophet Isaiah was speaking about.

This is what he says in chapter 55, about when the days of his reign come, the prince of peace. You will go out in joy, he says. You will be led forth in peace. And the mountains and the hills will break forth into singing.

[6 : 05] And even the trees of the fields will clap their hands. Behold, says the Lord, I will extend peace like a river. It's a picture of perfection, isn't it?

Of true life, joyous life, perfect life. He speaks about the desert rejoicing, blooming like the crocus. He speaks about the lame leaping, the blind seeing, the deaf hearing.

If you read through Isaiah's prophecy, you cannot miss the fact that the picture he is painting is a picture of perfect life in a perfect world.

True life as you perhaps imagine it could be or even should be. But of course it isn't. It isn't, as the Bible tells us, because of human sin, rebellion against God.

Because of the curse that has bound this world since man's first rebellion. But, says Paul, he is our peace. Jesus Christ is the prince of peace.

[7 : 06] And where he is, then perfect life like that is to be found. True life. The life that God created us to have.

And that is what you see if you read the Gospels in the New Testament. If you've never read through one of the Christian Gospels, there are copies of Luke's Gospel on the table outside. Please do take one and read it.

It will take you about an hour and a half. But it will tell you the greatest story ever told. When you read through the Gospels, what do you find? Well, in Jesus' presence, peace, true life breaks out everywhere.

The lame walk. The blind see. The deaf hear. Storms on the sea cease when he says, peace, be still. The hungry are fed.

The distressed. The demonized are calmed and found in peace. And all of that, you see, is a foretaste of what his permanent presence will bring forever when he returns to reign forever.

[8 : 09] When he comes to bring real and lasting peace. When Isaiah saw and prophesied these from hundreds of years before the Lord Jesus, he saw it all as part of one great event.

The coming day of the Lord. But when Jesus came, he explained that his kingdom would come in full power and glory. That it would find permanent peace only when his Gospel has reached every nation.

When he has gathered all that he is calling to himself from every tribe and language and people and nation. And on that day, he says, he will surely return. 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 as we celebrate today.

His one appearance guarantees the other. He came to guarantee 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.

Which means forever. Of the increase of his government and of peace, says Isaiah, there shall be no end. Because he is our peace. He is. And where he is, their true life will be forever.

[9 : 32] His eternal shalom. His peace. And so still the days are hastening on by prophet bards foretold towards the fullness of the time.

When comes that age of gold. Then earth and heaven renewed shall see the prince of peace, her king. And all the world repeat the joy which now the angels sing.

Jesus Christ is himself our peace, says Paul. But he goes right on to say that he came also to make peace.

That he might reconcile us both, Jew and Gentiles, to God in one body through the cross. Thereby killing the hostility.

Now what Paul is talking about there to the Ephesians is what God has done to unite in peace and reconciliation. The bitter warring enemies of this world.

[10:33] By uniting them together with Jesus Christ who is himself the only source of real reconciliation and peace for this world. What he is saying is that true reconciliation that leads to peace among human beings must begin with a true reconciliation and peace with God himself.

You see the root of all division, all bitterness, all hostility in this world is the self-righteousness within the human heart. Just think about it.

You bear a grudge when you feel hard done to. And somebody's wronged you. And you yourself, you feel superior, don't you? We feel like we're in the right when somebody's wronged us.

And that destroys our peace. We get filled with anger, with resentment. And it may simmer away. But eventually it comes out, doesn't it? One way or another and we act.

You see it happening in a marriage relationship. You see it happening in a work situation with industrial strife and so on. We've got the doctors on strike again. We're going to have all sorts of people on strike, I suspect, in this coming year.

[11:43] You see it on a national scale. You see it on an international scale too. Disputes, land disputes, for example, that simmer over centuries. That's what's going on, isn't it, in Ukraine, in Israel and Palestine, China and Taiwan and many other places.

And at root in all of these things is self-righteousness in the human heart. We justify our own stand, our own position. And we judge that the other one is wrong.

And so do our opponents. And so there's a destruction of peace. And none of us will admit that we're at fault, that we're in error. That we have to surrender. And that's why there's no peace.

But you see when Jesus came to make peace for us with God, he destroyed all possibility of self-righteousness for us. Because Paul says there in Ephesians 2, it is by God's grace that we've been saved.

Through faith, not our own doing, but God's gift. Not a result of works, so that no one can boast self-righteously. And that kills all our sense of self-righteousness.

[12:56] We're brought very near to God only, he says, by the blood of Jesus Christ. What could be more humbling than that?

There's only one thing I think harder in life that we find than to forgive someone. And that is to receive forgiveness. Because to receive forgiveness from someone is to be truly humbled, isn't it? It's to know that we can't undo some wrong. We can't set something right. We've got to receive it as a gift from the person that we've wronged. Their gracious forgiveness.

Something that maybe costs them very dearly. It's very hard, isn't it, to receive something that we know that we don't deserve. Because we're humbled by that.

We're humiliated by that. We hate that. But Jesus came to make peace for us. To do what we could never do. And it cost him everything.

[14:03] That's why the prophet Isaiah said of him that upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And only because of that, only because of that, can the Lord go on to say through the prophet that therefore, my steadfast love will never depart from you.

My covenant of peace will never be removed. And that's deeply humbling, isn't it? When we come to understand what it means for Jesus Christ to make peace for us with God by the blood of his cross.

When we understand what Jesus says, when he says, this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many, for you, for the givenness of sins.

When we understand that, it becomes very hard indeed to be self-righteous, doesn't it? It also becomes very hard for us to say, well, I'll never forgive that person for what they did to me.

I'll never be at peace with that person or with those people. Because we realize, don't we, that we can't be like that with our fellow Christians.

[15:15] We recognize that we must be reconciled whatever it costs us. Because we've been humbled, haven't we? We've been humbled by the grace and the mercy of the one who's reconciled us to God at great cost.

Made peace for us. He came to make peace, to make peace with God for us. And therefore, through hearts that have been humbled by that grace, to make peace among us.

Among people who know what it means to be reconciled by the grace and mercy of God. Now just imagine, just imagine a world where every person knows the grace, the humbling grace of God like that.

And has become a humble peacemaker, therefore. That is the perfect life. That is the true life that the Lord Jesus Christ will usher in at his return.

When all his enemies at last are banished. And only those who are humbled, who are reconciled by his grace remain. And then Isaiah says, They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.

[16 : 32] For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. Because he came to make peace.

To humble proud rebels. To reconcile them to God by mercy and by grace. He is the prince of peace.

That means he is our peace. And he comes to make peace. But how can that peace be ours? Yours and mine.

How can what Jesus did become real for me, for you, in our lives, just as it became real in the lives of his first followers? Well, Paul, in Ephesians 2, tells us one more vitally important thing.

It's that Jesus Christ came to preach peace. Ephesians 2, verse 17, he says this. And he came and preached peace to you who were afar off.

[17 : 35] That's the Gentiles. And peace to you who were near. That's the Jewish people. For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

Now, do you know something surprising there? Paul said to the Ephesians, he came and preached peace to you. Jesus came and proclaimed his peace to these pagan Ephesians who had now become Christian believers.

But we know that Jesus never went in the flesh to Ephesus. He descended to heaven many years, decades before these Ephesians first heard of Jesus.

How could Jesus have preached peace to them and imparted his peace to them directly? We can understand, can't we, how Jesus said to his disciples, Peace I leave with you.

My peace I give to you. In the upper room before his death. Well, we can understand how after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to them and said, Peace be to you. And receive the Holy Spirit.

[18 : 42] But how can Jesus pronounce peace on people in Ephesus in AD around AD 55? Or for that matter in Glasgow in the year 2025?

Well, of course, what Paul means is that Jesus himself came and proclaimed peace as Paul came and preached the truth of the gospel to those people.

When the good news of peace through Jesus Christ is preached. Then the Prince of Peace himself, who has all authority in heaven and on earth to bestow his peace, he is speaking to them.

And he himself comes and brings that peace and reconciliation through the reception of that gospel message. Because the ambassadors of Christ have his full authority to proclaim his peace.

Peter says, the Apostle Peter, in Acts chapter 3 of the Ascended Lord, God has exalted him as Prince and Savior to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.

[19 : 48] To give his Holy Spirit, he says, to those who obey him. That is, those who humble themselves and receive the message of forgiveness that only he can give.

So that we can have peace with God. And there's no other way, he says, but to receive that message. He came and preached peace to those ordinary people in Ephesus all those years ago.

When Paul preached the good news of the gospel of Christ to them. And he himself, the Prince of Peace, with all power and authority, he still comes today. And he preaches peace to everyone who will hear and who will receive that gospel message.

As the carol says, where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in. Meek souls, not proud souls.

Because it is self-righteousness that bars the door to the Prince of Peace. That pride and self-righteousness is the only thing that bars the door to that message of peace.

[20 : 56] But to the meek, to the humble, to those who know their own hearts, who feel the shame of their failures. Feel the sorrow for the lack of integrity in their life.

To them, well, Isaiah's words ring wonderfully true. 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, your God reigns. It's a wonderful message to them because they know that wherever that message is proclaimed, the Prince of Peace is

coming even now.

To proclaim peace. To assure fearful hearts. That he has accomplished the making of peace with God through his blood on the cross. And yes, on that great day of his coming, he will usher in peace like a river at last.

The perfect life of his everlasting kingdom of peace. A kingdom that will never, ever end. But friends, here is the wonderful thing. And this is the message of Christmas.

[22 : 08] That even now, wherever that gospel message is spoken, wherever it's heard and received, he draws near by his own Holy Spirit. And he whispers again his peace into anxious hearts, into fearful hearts.

The peace that was imparted to old Simeon, who you read of in Luke's gospel. In the temple where he met the infant Jesus. And saw in him, in the flesh, the salvation of God.

So that he could say, now you are letting your servant depart in peace. Total contentment with life. Total calmness facing death.

Because he received God's word of peace. About the Prince of Peace. And that is the message of Christmas. Peace is a princely gift.

And it's ours in the gift of God's Son. Let me read some words from our book, The Meaning of Christmas. Christmas is a time which reminds us of the great glad day for which the whole creation waits with a year longing.

[23 : 21] 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 a 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, they often do.

They prophesy the signs of coming spring have been seen in their blooming. We are still living in the frosts and cold east winds of the old order.

And what a bitter winter it often 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. And he has come. And he is the true life of all who receive him. He is our peace.

[24 : 25] And him alone is the way to true life. The true life of his eternal kingdom of peace. And he has made peace. Through the blood of his cross. To destroy all self-righteousness.

But to fulfill his promise. And to fill the humble with the joy of forgiveness. With the joy of reconciliation with God. Even now. And he preaches peace, friends.

Still today. To everyone who will hear him. Who will heed him. And who will bow to him. As Prince and Savior. Where meek souls will receive him.

Still the dear Christ enters in. And that's why Isaiah can promise to you. If you have received the message of his peace.

That 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.

[25 : 25] Hail the Son of Righteousness. Light and life. To all he brings. Risen. With healing. In his wings. Let's end this morning.

By singing. These wonderful words together. As we rejoice. In the one who brings us. The gospel of peace. Hark. The herald angels sing. Glory. To the newborn king. Amen.