

The Prince of Peace

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to be with you this morning. If we haven't met, my name is Keith Knowlton. It's a pleasure to bring God's Word with you this morning.

As James said, we're starting a brief sermon series as we lead up to Christmas looking at the names of Jesus. And today we'll be looking at the name, the Prince of Peace, taken from Isaiah chapter 9, verses 1 through 7.

So you can read that on the screen behind me or turn in your pew Bible to page 694. But by way of introduction, I wonder if how many of us have heard of the Christmas truce.

Going back to December 1914, World War I was raging. By that time, only five months have passed in the war and over a million men have died.

Many thought going to war that this war would only last a few months. But now they were entrenched in this trench warfare that had caused them to be locked in this bitter turmoil, this bitter stalemate, exhausted, and soldiers feeling the fatigue of war.

[1 : 05] But on Christmas Eve 1914, near Epers, Belgium, something rather extraordinary occurred. As the light was beginning to fade, the British soldiers could see off in the distance across from No Man's Land, in the German trenches, these little lights being lit.

And then slowly over No Man's Land, they hear the sound of Christmas carols being sung in German. And at first, the British troops thought this might be a trap. They thought this was very peculiar that this would happen.

But as they continued to listen, they realized this was no trap. This was true Christmas caroling, and slowly the British forces began to join in in English.

And what happened, even more extraordinary, was the next morning on Christmas Day, that German soldiers came out of their trenches with hands raised and beckoned the British soldiers to do the same. And they met in the middle of this No Man's Land.

And soldiers who were just hours before, readying themselves to shoot and kill one another, were now shaking hands, exchanging pleasantries, small gifts of tobacco and photographs.

[2 : 11] Even games of football were breaking out. These few hours, war had stopped. Guns were not fired, shells were not dropped, and these young men, weary from war, far from home, were granted this temporary, rather unexpected peace.

But as expected, by nightfall, command had come down from the generals to say, there is to be no fraternizing with the enemy. And by the next day, fighting had resumed.

This temporary truce did not last. And war continued for four more years, with millions more dying. The reality is this famous Christmas truth, it didn't end the war, but I think it shows really a universal truth that human hearts long for peace.

But that as man, we are not able to achieve this permanent peace on our own. And so as we turn to our passage today, we're looking at this prophecy that anticipates a different kind of peace.

Not a man-made peace, not a temporary peace, but a peace that is lasting and restorative, that comes from our one true king, the prince of peace. And so let's look at our passage together.

[3 : 22] Isaiah chapter 9, starting in verse 1. Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who are in distress. In the past, he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future, he will honor Galilee of the nations by the way of the sea beyond the Jordan.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has drawn. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy.

They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressors.

Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For unto us a child is born, for us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end.

[4 : 37] He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

This is the word of God. Will you pray with me? God, our Heavenly Father, we ask that you guide us this morning by your word and by your spirit, that in your light we may see light, that in your truth we may find wisdom, that in your will we may discover your peace.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Now I imagine that this passage is familiar to many of us. It's one of those passages that we easily dust off the Christmas season for a Christmas sermon or an Advent devotional.

And while I think it's good that we know this text, it's familiar to us, oftentimes we can pluck it out of its context without really knowing where does it fit into this Old Testament narrative. And so I want us to do when we begin is trying to figure out what is the context of this prophecy?

What is going on in the people of Israel at this time? This prophecy was given by God through the prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz. Now if you know anything about King Ahaz, if you were to rank the kings of Judah and Israel from best to worst, Ahaz would be at the very bottom of this list.

[6 : 07] Ahaz was a wicked king. He worshipped idols of other gods. He sacrificed his own sons to these idols. He took elements, the riches of the temple, and he gave them to other kings in order to make alliances with them.

And even as Israel starts to face judgment for having turned against God, his faithlessness even grows. He cuts up the vessels from the temple, he shuts the doors to the temple, and he sets up idols in every corner of Jerusalem.

And so Isaiah is instructed to go to Ahaz to encourage him to repent, to put his trust in God. He even says, Go give Ahaz the ability to ask for a sign that I will show him, that I will prove that I'm the one true God, and he'll put his trust in me.

But Ahaz refuses. So you think, Well, God has every right just to strike Ahaz dead right there to end his kingship at that point, but he doesn't. Instead, he grants him a sign, even though he refuses. He wants to prove his covenant faithfulness to his people, even when his people have been unfaithful to him. And so we see earlier on in the book of Isaiah, this first prophecy of this sign.

[7 : 17] A virgin will give birth to a son, and his name will be called Emmanuel, God with us. And so what we see in our passage today in chapter 9 is this same Christ child.

Now, it may seem obvious for us. We recognize this passage. It relates to Christmas and the birth of Jesus. But for these people, they have no concept of Christmas. They don't understand when this prophecy is going to be fulfilled.

And so it's good to ask, What would the people have thought in that time when they hear this prophecy of a prince of peace? Certainly, they long for peace as the Assyrian army is ready to overthrow them.

They want peace in their lives. They want peace in their nation. When will it come? Well, this wicked king Ahaz, he does die, and his son Hezekiah comes to the throne. And Hezekiah is actually a good king.

He repairs and he restores, and he reopens the temple. He gets rid of all the idols. He reorganizes the priests. He brings the people of Israel, the people of Judah to repentance, and they worship God once again.

[8 : 21] The thing is that Hezekiah, even though he was a faithful king, he couldn't fulfill this prophecy. Because it says that Hezekiah, as he amassed this wealth and this power and his influence, he too became prideful.

And he died, and peace did not remain in the land of Judah. And so this prophecy, it points out to us, there must have been someone greater who was being prophesied.

Because Hezekiah couldn't fulfill this prophecy. He is only a shadow of the one to come. This divine child is to be born. This only son of the Father, He alone can forever lift this cloud of darkness and establish this eternal kingdom.

And so that leads us to the titles we see in this passage. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. It's really this crescendo that we see. This Prince of Peace being this peak, this ultimate, this promised leader who promises to ensure the peace and prosperity and well-being of His people forever.

And so that title specifically, I want us to consider today, this Prince of Peace. What is this peace that our leader and king provides? Three ways I want us to consider this peace.

[9 : 37] First of all, this upward peace, an outward peace, and an inward peace. So let's first think about this upward peace. And I think when we do, I think it's important to define our terms.

What do we mean when we say peace? My family and I have been in the UK for over five years. And while we speak the same language, we've had to adjust to the vocabulary. There are certain words that we have meaning for in the US that have very different meaning in the UK.

So things like chips, or biscuits, or a vest, or trolleys, or pants. Right? All things that we need to make sure we understand what our terms are.

Even though we're speaking the same language, words can have very different meanings. So the same thing when we think about peace. What does peace mean? Oftentimes we think, well, it just means a sense of serenity or the absence of fighting.

But if we look at what this word peace means in the Old Testament, in this word shalom, which probably many of us have heard before, it has a much fuller meaning. It means a wholeness, a flourishing, a completeness.

[10 : 45] Not simply the absence of fighting, but the presence of harmony and order. And so this is exactly what we see in the creation story in Genesis.

In the beginning, we have a triune God who creates all things in the span of six days. And he says it is all good. He creates man in his own image that he may share in this peace.

He gives man a wife, Eve, to provide completeness for him. He gives them a garden with good things to eat. He gives them a purpose that they may take dominion over creation and experience this wholeness together.

We have a God who descends and walks in this garden in peace with Adam and Eve. But unfortunately, this shalom is broken when sin enters the world.

Adam and Eve are tempted by the serpent. They eat the fruit of the forbidden tree and their eyes are open to their nakedness. And so rather than walk in fellowship with God, they hide in shame.

[11 : 49] Rather than enjoy this peace, they run from God, fearing his judgment. But what we see next is something that's really remarkable because God could have condemned Adam and Eve there, but instead he speaks these words of shalom over them.

While there would be consequences for their action, God comforts his children with the promise that peace will come through one who will crush the head of this lying, murderous serpent.

Though sin has now separated man from God, God promises this full restoration will come and it's going to come through the seed of a woman. And so this is the beginning of God's rescue plan.

So as we continue on in the book of Genesis, we see that God comes to a man named Abram. And he chooses to bless Abram. And he says he's going to make him into a great nation that all nations through him will be blessed.

And as we continue on in the Bible, these descendants of Abraham, they become slaves in the land of Egypt. And God proves his faithfulness again. He raises up Moses to lead the people out of slavery, out of Egypt, into the promised land.

[12 : 59] And on their way there, he takes them to Mount Sinai where he again renews this covenant promise. He gives them the law with its blessings and curses. And so we've heard this blessing before.

Oftentimes we end our service with this blessing of Aaron, the high priest, to give to his people the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. And so we may think that after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, God's going to bring them into this promised land and we think, okay, this is where this restoration is going to occur.

This relationship that had been ruined by sin will be restored. God's people will be obedient and faithful and they'll experience this unending prosperity and blessing. We know that's not right.

Something we see very different occurs. Instead, we see this repeated cycle of sin and rebellion that's followed by discipline and judgment and brief periods of repentance and deliverance and then

what happens again?

[14:07] More sin, more rebellion. And so we see this is the history of God's people throughout the Old Testament. One of brokenness and chaos and disorder. One defined by war and occupation and division and exile.

And maybe you even experience this as you read these texts, this desire to cry out, when will peace come? It's obvious that they are not going to be able to save themselves.

When will this Messiah, when will this rescuer arrive? And what we see is a prophecy like one in Isaiah that promises this Prince of Peace, that points us forward to the coming of this Messiah.

And we see that He arrives in the most unexpected way. The Son of God becoming man, being born of a woman to a poor family in a stable. This is what the angels announce the night of Jesus' birth.

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased. Jesus, when He starts His earthly ministry, He too quotes from Isaiah when He announces His mission for coming to earth.

[15:18] What we see at the Last Supper before Jesus' crucifixion is that He takes this bread and He takes this wine and He tells His apostles, this bread is like My body that will be broken.

This wine is like My blood that will be spilled. And what does He declare to them? Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. And it's within days that He goes to the cross to fulfill the promise and the purpose for which He came.

What was also prophesied by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 53, He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with His wounds we're healed. And so again, it's not a peace that's simply this serenity. It's not simply a peace that's the absence of fighting. This is full restoration of our relationship with God.

And so this is what we see Paul talk about in Colossians 1 that Christ restores all things to God through His death making peace through the blood of Jesus. This is what we read earlier in the book of Romans chapter 5 that since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[16:33] So our relationship that had been ruined in the Garden of Eden has now been restored and it's not through the works of man. It's only through this promised Messiah who is truly our peace.

And so a question for each one of us this morning is have we been reconciled to God? have we experienced the wholeness and the restoration that comes only through the blood of Jesus? Because without the sacrifice of Jesus there's nothing that we can do to earn God's favor. There's nothing that we can do to put ourselves in right standing before God. Judgment and death are all that remain for us.

But we have Jesus who is our Prince of Peace Prince of Peace who loves to save sinners like me you and me loves to supply shalom between man and God.

And so that brings us to our second form of peace then. Not only an upward peace but an outward peace. That upward peace describes that vertical relationship between man and God. This outward peace describes this horizontal relationship between man and the world.

[17:45] These past few months if you've been with us we've been going through in the morning a sermon series on the book of Acts. And so we've been looking at what happens to the New Testament church after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection and ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

Well you see the apostles with the power of the Holy Spirit they're preaching a gospel of reconciliation. That though you talking to the Jewish leaders of the day though you crucify this man he is truly the Lord and the Christ and one who offers peace and life to each person.

And so recognize how this message was received by the New Testament church how it benefited the church. We read how the people of this New Testament church they devoted themselves to the teaching and preaching of God's word to fellowship to the breaking of bread and prayer.

They held all things in common they sold their possessions and belongings and distributed the proceeds to those in need. every day attending the temple together breaking bread in each other's homes they received their food with glad and generous hearts and so we see this beautiful picture of unity of God's people in the early church.

But what we see is this unity even goes a step further as we advance in the book of Acts. If we go to Acts 10 we see this vision that Peter has this vision of clean and unclean animals and it's God communicating to him that this gospel peace is not simply for the Jews it is for the Gentiles as well. [19:19] God offers his peace to all men. So again this is what Paul says in Ephesians 2 but now in Christ Jesus those who are far off talking about Gentiles like you and me have been brought near through the blood of Jesus for he himself is our peace he has made these two groups one Jew and Gentile he has made them one destroying the barrier dividing the wall this dividing wall of hostility.

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of two thus making peace. He came preaching peace to you who are far off and peace to those who are near.

This is true for us today certainly I would imagine most of us here are of that Gentile tribe right? we have been grafted into God's family so that the issue is not necessarily Jew or Greek today it is a matter of unity between all people in the body of Christ.

We are united in Christ's spirit. And so this is why Paul goes on to talk about the body of Christ the church as the body of Christ we're equipped for service we're built up in love we're united in faith. So again a question for us this morning does this describe our church? are we a church that loves to extend grace to one another rather than hold grudges?

[20:46] We talk a lot about the value of community groups do we desire to spend time together around God's word in times of prayer and encouragement as we put aside our work midweek or are we content to simply keep our distance to show up on a Sunday morning and be no further involved in the church?

Do we long to see to be a part of the work of the church extending the gospel to our community and to our city or do we pack our schedules just so full that we have no room to participate in the ministry of the church?

I think one of the greatest witnesses that we can have corporately as a church is to demonstrate the love of Christ to those around us. We want people to come through our doors to experience the warmth of fellowship and friendship.

We want the gospel to be portrayed in word and in deed in personal and intangible ways to those who don't know Christ. And we see it should be our desire not only for this peace to be extended in our community in our city but truly to the ends of the earth because this is what we see at the very end of the Bible in the book of Revelation when every nation and tribe and people and language come together and stand before the throne shouting salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And we long for this day of peace when God's people praise our Savior in unity giving praise to our King.

[22:30] This is the peace that the Prince of Peace gives our church. And finally this last form of peace in inward peace.

Many of you probably know that the Princess of Wales hosted her annual Christmas service just this past week and as she usually does she wrote an open letter to those who are attending the service. and I read the letter and I want to read just a few excerpts from this letter.

She began at its heart Christmas speaks of love taking form in the simplest most human ways not in sentimental or grand gestures but gentle ones.

These simple acts of care might seem small but they contribute to the beautiful tapestry of life to which we belong. At a time when life can sometimes feel fragmented and uncertain the Christmas season invites us to remember the power of reaching out to one another with generosity of heart understanding and hope.

As the year draws to a close I hope this season will bring moments of peace and clarity and that you will feel surrounded by the same love and care that you freely offer others. It's a lovely sentiment perhaps but pretty devoid of truth.

[23:44] See the Princess she describes I think how many people in our culture view Christianity excuse me view Christmas there's this desire for peace but people don't think about a divine love they concentrate on a human love.

They recognize disorder in our world but they think the simple remedy to this world is simply acts of kindness toward one another. The Bible shows us something very different is that disorder is not simply something that is around us disorder is something that is within us because of the fall our very desires are disordered and so we may long for wholeness but we try to find solutions of our

own that maybe if I can just get that job promotion then I'll experience satisfaction. Maybe if I can only find a spouse then I'll feel complete. Maybe if I can only do well on my exams then I'll be satisfied. Maybe if I can only fill in the blank and then I'll feel peace in my life. And so for the non-believer these disordered desires only bring about this constant striving and yearning hoping that we do enough good things hoping that we can collect enough things to make us comfortable hoping that if we lean into the sentimentality of this Christmas season with lights and songs and presents then we'll experience peace. But the Bible again tells a different story in the book of James chapter 1 verse 14 it says that each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own desires and enticed and those desires when conceived give birth to sin and sin when it's fully grown give birth to death. [25 : 35] Our disordered desires don't bring us life they only bring us death. And so even as believers we may experience this tension. Because of the fall we've become less than we ought to be.

Yes we've been reconciled to God but we still struggle with the reality of our sin. So we want to obey God we want to follow after him but also our sin nature still pulls us away and we're so often tempted to turn away from God.

And so often we are at war with ourselves. but it's important to realize that Jesus when he restored our relationship to God when he provided this means of salvation his work does not end there. He gives us his spirit that we may also continue to become more and more like Christ in our sanctification. So yes he provides us in inward peace through the restoration of our relationship with God but he also wants us to grow in this peace through the grace of God working in our lives. And so looking at Philippians 4 verse 7 Paul says this he says the peace of God which transcends our understandings will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

[26 : 52] And so he encourages us whatever's true whatever's noble whatever's right whatever's pure whatever's lovely whatever's admirable whatever's praiseworthy think about these things and the God of peace will be with you.

As believers we grow in the peace of God as we grow in likeness to Christ. But even so there is maybe a sense of incompleteness because though this peace is a gift to us maybe we recognize we don't experience it to its fullest extent now.

It's because we live in this period of the already and the not yet. And this is what we even celebrate at this Advent season. We celebrate that Christ has come but we're also looking forward to when Christ will return.

He has come and he's brought us peace but the full experience of that peace is still yet to come. And so that is our hope. The promised bodily return of Jesus our Prince of Peace who will establish a new heaven and a new earth a better Eden where we will once again enjoy perfect upward outward and inward peace with our God.

This is what's described at the end of our passage in verse 7 of the increase of his government and of the 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 forever more.

[28 : 26] And so is this our hope? because this is a prophecy that is true and is also coming true. Because Jesus Christ our Prince of Peace has come and he is coming again to bring full restoration full completeness full harmony between God and man.

And so may this be something that we marvel at this Christmas season. Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you for sending your son as our Prince of Peace.

We thank you though we are responsible for sin you have desired to restore our relationship. And so we recognize Father that is nothing that we can do to make ourselves right before you.

But we come to the cross and we claim the blood of Jesus. who brings us peace. And so may the reality of that peace transcend our lives and our relationship with others and our relationship with you.

A peace that simply doesn't come through sentimentality at Christmas but a peace that comes in the confidence of Jesus' work on the cross. May we live with that joy and confidence today.

[29 : 50] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We have one final hymn of praise. Good Christian men rejoice. Please stand and we'll sing together.

Amen. Good Christian men rejoice with heart and soul and voice.

Give ye heed to what we say. Jesus Christ was born this day. Walks and ass before him bow and he is in the manger now.

Christ is born today. Christ is born today. Bluetooth Bluetooth this. Christ is born for this. Good Christian men rejoice with heart and soul and voice.

Now ye need not fear the grave. Jesus Christ was born to save. Calls you one and calls you all to gain his everlasting hope. Christ was born to save. Christ was born to save.

[32 : 02] Now hear these familiar words of God's blessing to his people. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face to you and give you peace.