

The Prince of Peace

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do ask that by your Holy Spirit, you would still the busyness of our hearts and minds, the busyness of our lives, and that we would be able to be still and know that you are God.

You have chosen to be God in the most magnificent of ways. Give us your Holy Spirit, we ask, so that we may see Jesus clearly. In his name, amen.

I would say you may be seated, but you already are. So you're ahead of the game. That's good. We're going to be in Isaiah chapter 9 today.

Just two verses there, verse 6 and 7. But before we start that, I want to begin with a story. It was December 24th, 1914.

And thousands of men's bodies laid dead. British, German, French in the fields of Western Belgium. And thousands of men's bodies are in the trenches waiting for their own soon impending death.

[1 : 15] If you know your history, you know that it was five months into World War I. A war that would eventually take 20 million human lives. And it was the first Christmas Eve to come under the dark gloom of that war.

In these Belgian trenches, British and German troops fought against each other and did everything they possibly could to kill each other. Their hatred for each other grew stronger and stronger as every day passed by.

And they saw more and more of their friends killed by the enemy. It was an atmosphere where you had to kill or be killed. Destroy or be destroyed.

There are a few moments in history where hostility has ever been greater. And yet it was in that dehumanizing brutality, in that dehumanizing hostility, that one of the most beautiful things happened.

There was an Advent carol service. A Christmas carol service. It began with the Germans.

[2 : 19] They started by putting Christmas trees above their trenches, lit with candles, flickering light, piercing the darkness of the night. And then the troops started to exchange greetings and Christmas carols.

They started shouting them from one trench to the other across the 40, 50, 60 yard distance. And after a couple hours, eventually, a couple men had the audacity to crawl out of the trenches and walk over to their enemies and meet them face to face in the middle space between the trenches called No Man's Land.

And eventually, over time, one troop after another emptied from the trenches and No Man's Land became filled with thousands of troops who started exchanging photos of their family, Christmas greetings, shared food and cigarettes, buried their dead, and even went so far as to have a Christmas carol service together, singing in the middle of a minefield of death.

And for just a brief moment, the firing of guns stopped and was replaced by the melodious sound of song. For just a brief moment, hostility was overcome with peace.

What a beautiful picture. And that is what Christmas is ultimately about. Peace breaking into the most dire circumstance. Peace overcoming hostility in the most honest of ways.

[3 : 55] The truth of Christmas tells us that Jesus, that God himself has entered into human history so that he can rescue sinners, so that he can bring us to peace with God.

And the truth of Christmas is that God himself has entered into human history so that he can reconcile enemies, so that he can bring us at peace with one another. And that's ultimately what Isaiah chapter 9, verses 6 and 7 are about.

They say this, For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace, and of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. Now let me ask you this question. When you hear the word peace, what images come to mind? Think for just a second. When you hear the word peace, what images come to your mind? Maybe for some of you, it's the last time you did yoga, and there's incense all around. And maybe for some of you, the image of peace is reading a book next to a fire when it's snowing outside a couple days ago.

[5 : 12] Maybe for some of you, the image of peace is sitting on the beach of Hawaii, and the toughest question you have to answer is, what flavor smoothie do I want? Maybe that's your image of peace.

We tend to think of peace as the absence of hostility, or this serenity. And we often think of peace as us being by ourselves in many respects.

But this is actually very far from what the biblical richness of the word peace is. The word peace in the Bible is a big salvation word. It means not simply the absence of hostility.

It means the presence of holiness and justice and well-being. It means not merely the absence of enemies, but it means the presence of thriving relationships.

Relationship with God, relationship with people, and right relationship with creation. And it means not merely personal salvation and forgiveness, but it means the restoration and the renewal of all of creation.

[6 : 18] And so peace means total flourishing, the way that God intended the world to be from the very beginning. And God's intention from the very beginning is finally coming into being through this little child born in Bethlehem.

God brings peace. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. Now you and I both know that our world is filled with hostility and desperation.

And we know we are in desperate need of a Prince of Peace. Nations still wage war, sin and death still abound, and slavery and oppression still run wild.

And we know that it's not just our world out there that still is in hostility and disarray. We know that is true of our own lives as well. We are in disarray.

[7 : 25] Our hearts still wander, loving everything except for the living God. Our minds still continue to believe that we can be self-dependent, that we know better than the living God.

And our wills still persist in living in such a way that's all about us. But it's into this very context that God comes to bring peace.

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

And of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end. At Christmas, we celebrate the fact that the Prince of Peace has come into the world, and that one day, all of creation will be restored again.

And we look forward to that day with great longing. But not only that, at Christmas, we celebrate the fact that Jesus' peace has come to us in the very present reality of our circumstances.

[8 : 33] The world tries to offer us peace by saying, you've got to escape your circumstances, or you have to control your circumstances. You've got to take them by the hand and overcome them. But that's not what Jesus does.

That's not what the Bible says to us. The Bible says that you have peace because Jesus comes into our circumstances and offers it. Jesus gives us peace that's not dependent on our circumstances, but is dependent on him and on him alone.

Another way of saying it is God doesn't say, come up here and I'll give you peace. God says, I'll come down there and give you peace. And that's exactly what happens on Christmas Eve.

The Prince of Peace comes into the hostility and danger of our own lives. The depression and despair that we experience. The Prince of Peace comes into our fears and our failures, our anxieties and our uncertainties.

The Prince of Peace comes into our sin and our rebellion. Our utter brokenness and shame. And he comes to set up his rule and his kingdom in his government.

[9 : 45] And it's like no kingdom we've ever seen before. Because we realize that the Prince of Peace does not secure his peace by using guns and using swords. The Prince of Peace doesn't secure his peace by using money and power.

He does it through the most unlikely of means. Through a Roman cross. Rather than the throne of power, the Prince of Peace chooses the throne of weakness.

And rather than the throne of glory, the Prince of Peace chooses the throne of shame. It's on the cross that God ultimately secures our peace with him and with each other.

And that's why when Jesus Christ rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, he appeared to his disciples when they were locked behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. And he appeared to them and he said, peace be with you.

And then he did a very surprising thing. He showed them his hands, his nail-pierced hands. And then he showed them his side, his spear-pierced side.

[10 : 48] And then he said to them one more time, peace be with you. The Prince of Peace declares that he gives peace through what he did on the cross.

It's the peace of restored relationship with God and restored relationship with each other. It's the peace of forgiveness and presence. It's the peace of reconciliation and healing.

And this is what the Prince of Peace is offering you tonight. The Prince of Peace who was born in a manger and then suffered ultimately for you is offering you peace tonight.

And so I have to ask you, do you know the Prince of Peace? Because his name is Jesus of Nazareth. In the midst of all the presents and the eggnog lattes and the Mariah Carey music and the hustle and the bustle, do you know the Prince of Peace?

Because his name is Jesus the Christ. In the midst of all the joy and the sorrow and the light and the darkness and the sin and the love and the friendship and loneliness, do you know the Prince of Peace tonight?

[11 : 57] Because his name is Jesus, the Son of the living God. And do you know him personally? Have you entrusted your whole entire life to the one who came into the world to give you peace?

Friends, I urge you tonight, do not leave here without considering the wonderful gift that God is giving you. The Prince of Peace has come into the world to offer you peace.

And the Prince of Peace has come into the world to give you himself. And he wants you to receive that tonight in all of its fullness. because that is the glory of Christmas, that God comes down so that we may receive him.

For to us, a child is born. To us, a son is given and the government shall be on his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[13 : 07] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.