

Advent Peace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 December 2022

Preacher: Fiona Lloyd

[0 : 00] So we're on to the second in our Advent series, and this morning we're going to be looking at Advent peace. Last week we talked about hope, and John talked to us about the hope that we have in Advent, and the hope that Christ brings to us.

And this morning, the second of our series, we're focusing on peace. So I'm going to start with a couple of very well-known readings. We've already had one of them, but it bears repeating. They'll be up on the screen as well, but I'm going to read them from my Bible. So we're going to read, first of all, from Isaiah chapter 9. So I promised Veronica and I didn't confer, but they're words that are worth hearing again.

Reading from verse 6, and it says, For to us a child is born, to 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 increase of his government and peace, there will be no end.

[1 : 14] 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.

And the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. And then a verse from the beginning of Romans 5. Next slide, please, Josh, thank you.

Which says, Therefore, since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Just carry on to verse 2.

Through which we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. So, I want to thank Veronica for having those few moments of quiet, and just encouraging us to focus on the names of Jesus.

And I don't know about you, but I felt really peaceful doing that, which is a good start to a sermon on peace. But it was nice just to take that time to be quiet and to focus.

[2 : 23] And we'll come back to that during the course of this sermon. But I wanted to start by thinking about what we actually mean by peace. Now, if you went and talked out to the average person in the street, you'd probably get all sorts of answers.

I've put a nice, peaceful image there that I found on the internet. But you can imagine sitting on that bench, looking at the view, maybe with a nice cup of tea, and just feeling very peaceful. But I imagine if we ask people outside, we might get absent ideas such as, well, peace is an absence of conflict.

And we often pray in our services, particularly for the situation in Ukraine at the moment, but for other countries where there is conflict. And a few weeks ago, we acknowledged Remembrance Sunday, and we talked about the importance of peace.

And so for a lot of people, a peace is just about an absence of conflict. And I think the Bible touches on that, but it's so much more spiritual peace than that.

So absence of conflict. When we talk about, if you've got small children, you talk about having a peaceful Christmas, part of your hope is that the children won't fight over their new presents, or that Auntie Ethel, who doesn't really get on with Uncle Bert, but you've invited them both, don't fall out and be rude to each other.

[3 : 40] So we think of peace as being an absence of conflict. We might think of peace as being the opportunity to get away from it all. If you've been to Healing Streams, it's lovely just having that opportunity, even though it's not very far from outside Whitby, but just to sit and be quiet and admire the scenery.

It's a letting go of normal responsibilities. And for some people, peace is about putting down all the things they worry about from day to day, not having to focus on those, let go of their normal

responsibilities, find somewhere nice to sit like that, and just forget all the things that you normally worry about.

Some people would say peace is about me time. Now, when I was kids small, I had found this great book, which I think I must have given away, but it's about the mum of a family.

It's a family of elephants, but use your imagination. But anyway, mum had several children, and basically she was trying to find five minutes peace to herself, and it talks about all the ways she tried to go and find peace, you know, and she sat in the bedroom with a cup of tea, and the youngest one came and wanted a story, and I think eventually it said she ran herself a nice bath and got in the bath, and she had four minutes and 32 seconds of peace before another child came and jumped in the bath with her.

So we often think about peace, about having some me time, when we can sort of almost ignore other people, particularly those who might cause us hassle some of the time, or we think cause us hassle anyway, or that we have responsibility for, and it's time just to focus on ourselves, think about me, what feels good for me.

[5 : 14] And while there's nothing wrong with self-care and looking after ourselves, that's not what it means by biblical peace. We also might get the idea that peace is about quietness and tranquility.

It's an absence of noise and bustle, especially for parents of small children. And as somebody who doesn't really like crowds particularly, you know, I love being somewhere where there's not lots of noise and lots of bustle.

And even if you're a raging extrovert, my guess is that sometimes you actually just want time to step aside from that, have an absence of noise, an absence of busyness and a bustle, and just experience quietness and tranquility.

And all of these are things that people might suggest are meanings for peace. But I think when we look at the Bible, it's so much more. There are lots and lots of references in Scripture to peace.

I picked a couple that John had suggested. There are lots of others you could have a look at. When we think about Christmas as being the season of peace and goodwill to all.

[6 : 23] And I would encourage you to go back and look up all the references to peace because I could have just read out all of those and it would have taken me longer than my allotted time. So that's a bit of homework if you want it, to go and look up references to peace in the Bible.

But I just want to go back to that verse in Romans that I read out. And it says, Therefore, since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God.

It's not just peace in a vacuum. It's peace with God. We have been made right with God. We have relationship with God. And I believe that peace, when we look at it biblically, is about relationship and particularly relationship with God, being in that right relationship with God.

When we talk about Jesus coming to earth, we know that he came to bring us back into right relationship with the Father. He didn't just come to give us a nice, warm, fuzzy feeling or to give us quiet when we want it.

He came to restore relationship between himself, sorry, between us and the Father. And Micah talks about, when it talks prophetically about Jesus, talks about he is our peace.

[7 : 39] It's not that just he came to bring peace, but he is peace. He is the means of peace. He's the one by which we are restored to relationship with God. It's not just a nice, warm, fuzzy feeling.

Sometimes we think peace is about that, just feeling nice and comfortable. But it's much, it's nice to feel warm and comfortable, but it's much more than that. There's a verse I love it, or a couple of verses I love in Colossians, which talk about once you were enemies of God because of your evil behavior, but now he's reconciled you in order to present you without blemish, free from accusation. And I feel, although it doesn't mention peace specifically, it's a great verse that captures the idea of peace, of us being made right with God, us being at peace with God because of what Jesus has done.

Jesus came to reconcile us. He came to make sure that we could stand before God without blemish and free from accusation. If you're anything like me, it's very easy to think of all the things you've done wrong, all the blemishes, and to feel accused, feel, you know, I should have done this that way and I could have done that better, and to hear that voice of accusation in my head.

But Jesus came so that we could be free from accusation. Peace with God means recognizing that we're free from accusation. If we feel ourselves being accused, that's not from God.

[9 : 06] If we feel that we're full of blemishes, that's not from God because Jesus has enabled us to come into God's presence, free from blemish. It's also good to remember that peace is actually a

gift of God.

Jesus, when he was talking to his disciples shortly before he went out to the Garden of Gethsemane and was rested and crucified, said, my peace I leave with you.

I don't give it as the world gives. But he gave his peace to his disciples as a gift, which when you think about what was to happen only a few hours later, is really striking because I'm sure the disciples didn't feel particularly peaceful at that point when they saw what was happening to Jesus. And the one on whom they'd pinned their hopes of being the Messiah was arrested and put to death. And we know how the story ends and it's quite hard to put yourself into the mindset how the disciples were feeling.

But Jesus said, I leave my peace with you. It's also a fruit of the Spirit. If you remember that famous verse in Galatians, fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, and all the rest of them.

[10:19] It's something that we should be growing in us. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, this should result in a growth of peace.

And again, that doesn't mean that we just always float around feeling nice and warm and peaceful all the times, but it's about understanding that peace that we have from God, that relationship with God, that restored relationship with God.

So leaning on the Holy Spirit, inviting him to work in us, should result in all those things, which includes peace, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

All those things. But it's easy to think love the first one and then we get hung upon some of the ones that we find difficult, like patience. But peace is a fruit of the Spirit.

And as we grow in relationship with God, so peace should grow in our lives. I was struck again as reading that passage after I'd sent the slides to Josh, so this isn't on this one, but it talks about of the increase of his government, in the Isaiah passage, his government and peace, there will be no end.

[11:32] The peace that we have from God is an everlasting peace. Okay, the peace that you get from shutting the kids out of the room and sitting down with a cup of tea is very short-lived. And I know because I've experienced it.

The peace that you get from going and sitting at St. Oswald's and looking at that lovely view is great, but it's not a permanent peace. But the peace that we get from God is an eternal peace. It's not just about feeling peaceful now, it's about an ongoing peace. It's about that ongoing relationship with God. It's about the fact that we can call him our Father and we are at peace with him.

So if that's the case, then this peace of God should also characterize our relationships with one another. This feels a bit trickier because we know we need to be at peace with God and it's easy to understand that.

Feeling at peace with one another can be a bit harder sometimes. Okay, you're all lovely people and you're all very generous and forgiving, but I'm sure I annoy some of you some of the time.

[12:34] And that's what happens in a relationship. In families, you know, we love each other, but we can still wind one another up. We might not feel peaceful in our relationships.

But if we want to model the peace that God gives us, we need to learn to live in peace with one another. Now, that doesn't mean that we never disagree with one another.

It's okay to disagree. Disagreement can be healthy. Having debates about things, conversations about things can be healthy. But the way we handle our disagreements needs to be Christ-like.

If we are going to model and grow peace in our relationships with one another, if we're going to live at peace with our Christian brothers and sisters, it's not just how we react when we're feeling, all nice towards one another, but it's about how we respond when things are a little bit tricky or scratchy or we don't like what somebody's done.

How do we handle that disagreement? And do we do it with an attitude of wanting to develop peace and to live in peace? Or do we do it with an attitude of wanting to say, I'm right, you have to agree with me?

[13:42] Because as soon as we do that, we're not remembering that God came to bring, sent Jesus to bring reconciliation and to bring peace. So I just thought I'd like to move on to a few misconceptions we can have about peace.

I wanted to read a bit from this book. It's called Gifts of Grace. It's an Advent devotional. I had to review it for somebody, so I actually read it first in about September, but it was so good, I thought I'd come back to it during Advent.

And this guy, Jared Wilson, talks about the idea that at Christmas, we often think about the gifts we're going to give each other and get hung up on our present lists.

But he says it's good to focus on all the gifts that God gives to us. So he starts on December the 1st and goes through the 25th and talks about the things that God has given us. And it's been really helpful to me in reflecting back on just what God has done for me and getting things into focus.

But his chapter on peace, he says, so this is the 6th of December, so I'm getting slightly ahead of myself, but never mind. He said it's a strange irony that for many of us, what we look forward to as a great festive respite from the hustle and bustle of normal life turns out to be even more hustly and bustly than any other time of year.

[15:09] Anyone relate to that? Yeah. He says, I confess, I often turn the corner towards the new year feeling worn down and chewed up and as though I'm dragging myself across the finish line into January.

But then he goes on to say, one idea I've had to come to terms with is that the reality of God's peace doesn't necessarily or even usually eradicate the world's agitation.

You know, we think that when we've got peace in our lives, maybe our problems will disappear or fade into the distance, but actually that's not the case. Sometimes God stills the raging storms outside, but more often than not, he has the eyes more set on the storms inside.

And then he goes, quote out that verse I mentioned earlier about Jesus saying, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives, but let your hearts, sorry, let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

And he says, notice Jesus is not promising that everything in his disciples' lives is going to be smooth sailing now that they're following him. You know, it would have been really nice if he was, you know, he said, come to me, all your problems, gone.

[16:24] But he doesn't actually say that. He doesn't promise peaceful circumstances, but instead he speaks peace to their hearts. And he says, if we're going to have, keep living for a while in this world of trouble, what could be better than to know we are citizens of heaven in the meantime?

Really recommend this book. It's very encouraging, very helpful. But so, misconceptions about peace. So next slide, please, Josh. Oh, sorry, I've missed one out.

Right, we'll come back to that in a minute. Misconceptions about peace. We often think it's a feeling we've got to drum up. You know, we think, oh, you know, if I concentrate or, you know, I can make myself feel peaceful.

I know I've got to feel peaceful so, you know, I'll try really hard and I'll focus really hard. If you've ever tried that, it doesn't really work, does it? But then we get into the attitude of, well, you know, I don't feel peaceful and we start beating ourselves up because we're not feeling peaceful.

And if you've ever tried that, you know, it only makes things worse, you know, you say, oh, I must feel peaceful. Oh, I must be a dreadful Christian and it just makes things worse. You feel less and less peaceful even though you're trying harder and harder to feel peaceful.

[17:43] Jesus never said, this is something you've got to build up for yourselves. He said it was a gift. Another misconception which you have mentioned in that passage I read from the book is that it means an absence of problems.

I wish it did mean this but it doesn't. We can get into the mindset of, well, after I've dealt with this issue then I'll feel more peaceful. You know, we think, well, I'm really worried about that happening this week but once that happens it'll be out of the way and I'll be able to feel peaceful then and I think there's a danger particularly at Christmas it's, you know, once I've done the Christmas shopping I'll be able to relax and feel more peaceful.

Once I've sent the Christmas cards, once I've bought the turkey and it goes, you know, once I've wrapped the presents once the relatives have been and gone I'll feel more peaceful and we sort of push that peace further and further into the distance because we think that peace is contingent on getting past a particular issue or a problem or just a time of busyness.

But peace doesn't mean an absence of problems. The peace that Jesus brings is to be in the midst of our difficulties, the midst of our daily lives, the midst of when we're feeling bad or feeling rubbish or actually feeling great, Jesus brought that peace for us to experience at all times.

Another misconception is that it means we stop being busy. Anybody feel busy this time of year? Yep. Yep. I've had a really busy few weeks training new staff at work which has been really good fun and really interesting but boy have I felt busy and very focused on that and it's, you know, even when I'm not at work it's sort of going round and round my head.

[19 : 29] We can think that productivity and peace are opposed to one another. That's not necessarily the case. It's true that busyness can distract us from the things that bring peace and from focusing on God who gives us peace but again if we wait till we've stopped being busy to feel peaceful we're not going to feel peaceful this side of heaven.

So we need to let go of the idea that, you know, I've just got to get to the end of this week and then I can be peaceful. You know, if I get this job done then I can sit down and be peaceful because there's always something else waiting.

So, can we go back to the previous slide Josh, I'll jump past. So just looking at the Hebrew word for peace which comes up a lot and it's a word that I'm sure you've heard before, shalom.

And there are lots of words associated with this but I picked out some that I think are particularly relevant for today. A sense of completeness, of soundness, of being well, a sense of our welfare, thinking about our welfare, about feeling safe, about contentment.

When we think about shalom, I mean, we translate it as peace but actually it's much more than that. And again, if you want to, you could look that word up and find all the different words that's associated with that sense of shalom but it's a much wider sense of well-being than just feeling peaceful.

[21 : 01] We are complete in Christ. We have, we can trust his word in the soundness of his word. We know that he is concerned about our welfare and well-being.

We have a place of safety with Christ. Christ. And we can be content in him. And all these are associated with biblical peace.

So, moving on to how do we grow peace or grow in peace? You can think about it either way. So, next slide please, Josh.

I'm sorry, two slides on. Thank you. First of all, remember it's a gift. If we think it's something we have to engineer for ourselves, chances are we won't experience much peace because we get distracted.

We're not very good at sort of building up peace for ourselves. We need to remember that it's a gift from God. Jesus came to bring us peace between ourselves and God.

[22 : 07] God, but that's the gift of God. Okay, and then although we talk about us accepting Jesus and choosing to follow Jesus, that's because of the gift of God. God reached out to us before we turned to him.

And if that's the case, then it's good to look to the giver. And that's why I found what you did, Veronica, about focusing on those names of Jesus really helpful. When we focus on Jesus and what he's done for us and how he's brought us into relationship with God, it's much easier to accept that peace that he brings.

There's a lovely verse in Isaiah 26 that talks about focusing, and it says in one version, you'll keep the person in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee.

And I love that word stayed. I think it's a slightly older translation, but just the idea that if I'm keeping my mind on God and what he's done for me, he will keep me in that place of perfect peace.

So it's that sense of focusing on Jesus, what he's done for us, looking to the giver. It's good too to meditate on the wonder of the incarnation, particularly at this time of year.

[23 : 27] It's that story we've all heard lots and lots of times before, but let's not lose our sense of wonder that God came to earth as a tiny baby and was born in a stable in poverty, in obscurity, in a life of suffering because he wanted to restore us to relationship with God.

Our daughter is currently expecting a baby. Yes, very exciting, but just the idea of having that tiny person in our family again who's going to be so vulnerable and need lots of looking after, but God made himself vulnerable for us.

But it's good too, as we meditate on the wonder of the incarnation, to remember why Jesus came, so also to meditate on the meaning of the cross, the mystery of God coming down to earth in human form to die for us.

There's that famous passage in Isaiah that talks about the suffering servant, but one of the things it says is the punishment that brought us peace was upon him. It was through the suffering of Jesus

that we experience that peace with God.

So I'd encourage you to spend time meditating on the incarnation, but also on the cross, and looking at that whole story. Jesus came as a tiny baby, but he came to die, and then be raised to life, so that we might have peace with God.

[24 : 58] God's God's God's God's word. I found a verse in Psalm 119, I've forgotten how it goes exactly, but it says something about that there is peace for those who love your law.

When we focus on God's word, we spend time in God's word, that focuses our attention back on him, and that grows peace within us. Choosing to trust God.

peace comes from acknowledging that God is in control. If we want biblical peace, not just five minutes peace, we need to acknowledge that God is in control.

He is sovereign. Whatever's going on in our lives, and sometimes it might feel a bit out of control, but God is sovereign. He is in control, and we need to choose on a daily basis to surrender to him, and as we do that, that brings us back to that place of peace.

If I'm trusting myself my own abilities, or trusting Andy, or John, or anybody else, sorry guys, but sooner again you're going to let me down. Andy isn't obviously now.

[26 : 06] But when we trust in God, he's not going to let us down, and that grows that sense of peace in him. Learn contentment.

If you look at the world, and if you look at the TV at the moment, and all the adverts are on saying, you know, you need to have this perfume, and this aftershave, and this Christmas dinner, and goodness knows what else, to be satisfied.

It feels like they've been on for months already, and now we're going to have them non-stop between now and Christmas, and then there'll be the sales. But it's all about, you need to have this to be complete, you need to be whole, you need this particular item in your life.

But Paul talked about learning contentment, and he said, I've learned to be content not just when I don't have very much, but also when I've got plenty. Whatever our situation, let's look to God and let's learn to be content with what we have, what he's given us.

It's hard to experience peace when we're always hankering after something else, and I think you can do that whatever your situation, you know, we always think, well, if I just had this, my life would be sorted, my life would be straightforward, you know, had obvious things like new job, new car, bigger house, but you know, we can say, you know, if I was three inches taller, you know, my life would be happy, that's not going to happen, is it?

[27 : 31] But you know, if my hair was a different shade, you know, if I had a different skill, and we hanker after things that we haven't got, instead of learning to be content in God, but when we learn that contentment, we experience God's peace.

It's also good to be thankful, not just this time of year when people are giving us presents, but to be thankful on a daily basis, and not just for the big things, it's easy, you know, to give thanks to God for sending Jesus to die on the cross in our place, but let's give thanks for the little things as well. You know, most mornings when I wake up, the first thing I do is make myself a cup of tea, and I think, thank you for cups of tea, because by the time I've had half a cup of tea, I feel vaguely human again. But let's be thankful for the little things as well as the big things.

This isn't a sense of false piety, so I know people talk about, you know, or Paul talks about being thankful in all circumstances, and some people think, well, I've got to be thankful for all the horrible things as well.

There's a bit in Adrian Plass's diary, if you've read it, and somebody stubs their toe, I've forgotten which character, and somebody else says, oh, what a blessing to stub your toe, I don't think that's what it means by being thankful, but let's have a genuine appreciation of all that God has given us, and all that he's done for us, and let's make that an ongoing habit, because as we choose daily to thank God for who he is, and what he's done for us, that brings us peace in his presence, that grows that gift of peace in us, and as we do that, people around us will look, why are you so peaceful, particularly in this situation, why are you so peaceful, and we have an answer, it's because we're trusting in God, and he has given us that gift of peace.

[29 : 26] peace. So, just something to take away, and to think about, and to pray about, one suggestion is look up other references for peace in the Bible, but more generally, I'd encourage you, and I'm including myself in this, to ask God to show you how you can experience more of his peace this Christmas, and beyond, and one of the ways you might find helpful to do that is to choose a verse or a phrase to meditate on or to pray over.

So, that verse in Romans about we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, what does that mean? How does it affect the way I live day to day?

The fact that of his government and peace there will be no end, what does that make me think about my life? How does it help me focus on my eternal future, not just the here and now? So, I'd encourage you to ask God to give you a phrase or a verse or a line from a hymn that focuses on peace and just ask him to show you how you can experience more of his peace this Christmas.