

Advent 2022: *Prince of Peace*
Isaiah 9:6-7

Merry Christmas Church! As we gather tonight, I want you to know that I understand the complexity of who is here this evening. I know for some of you, life is going well, and you're just happy to be here and to celebrate Christmas. For others, you're barely hanging on. This has been a hard year, and you don't feel much like celebrating anything. For many, this Christmas Eve is a reminder of those you have lost in the past year...and tonight is a particularly emotional and difficult time for you. Still others are here because it means a lot to your family that you agreed to come, but truth be told, you would rather be just about anywhere else right now. You don't go to church, you don't necessarily agree with Christianity, and you are eager to get this over with as soon as possible. Whatever your situation might be, I hope you will simply rest. Take a deep breath and know that you are welcome, and maybe...just maybe...the God who created you has a word for you this evening.

Over the past few weeks we have been looking at the messianic prophecy found in Isaiah 9. This text was written over 700 years before Christ, but the text sounds like it was written specifically about Jesus. You might recognize several lines from Isaiah 9 that appear in Handel's famous "Messiah"...that is because the Church has long believed that this passage prophesied about the coming Christ, whose birth we celebrate tonight. We have been looking specifically at the four names or character traits that Isaiah describes in vs. 6: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. So, with no further ado, let's stand and read this famous prophecy together.

²The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

³You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

⁴For 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.

⁵For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For 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.

⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,

Over the last several weeks we have looked at the titles of Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Everlasting Father. This evening I shall take just a few minutes to reflect on the fourth and final title of the Messiah, “Prince of Peace.”

My message will fall under three subheadings: 1) The Government of Peace; 2) Peace with God in a Troubled World; and 3) The Person of Peace.

I. The Government of Peace

So...“What do you want for Christmas?” Has anyone ever asked you that question? If you’re like me, it’s an awkward question because no matter how I respond, it sounds selfish. I really want to say, “I would like a new trolling motor for my boat,” but what in the world does that have to do with Christmas? Why should I get anything “for Christmas?” Alas, we have so corrupted Christmas, have we not? After all, Christmas is not about what we want to get...it’s about celebrating the gift that has already been given! Christmas is about the fulfillment of the prophecy we just read. It’s the story of a people who walked in darkness...the darkness of sin, the darkness of war, the darkness of depression, the darkness of loss, the darkness of anxiety, the darkness of injustice, the darkness of despair...but now those who walked in darkness have seen a great light! And just as predicted, the Light comes in the form of a child born unto us...a Son given to us. It is the news of a King who has come into the world to set things right, once and for all. This child shall grow to be a man who will forevermore be known as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. He will institute a new government...a government of peace, and that government shall never end!

Over 700 years after this passage was written in Isaiah 9, angels from heaven proclaimed exactly this good news to the startled shepherds on that first Christmas: “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is well pleased.’”

Just as Isaiah had prophesied, the light of the world came appeared among those walking in darkness. A was child born unto us...a Son was given to us. His name was Jesus, the Prince of Peace!

Now, some 2000 years later, here is the tension that we can all feel on this Christmas Eve: if Jesus is the Prince of Peace, if He was the long-awaited Messiah, then why is there still so much war, conflict, and misery in the world? Why is anxiety and depression at an all-time-high in our country? Why does it seem that our culture is more divided and more hostile than ever? Why does PEACE seem more elusive than ever before? If Jesus is the light of the world, why is there

still so much darkness? These are fair questions...but these are questions that can be answered, and the answers will bring hope and peace to your life if you have the ears to hear.

Based upon what we just read and a bit of common sense, it stands to reason that to inherit the peace offered by the Prince of Peace, we must be under His government. His government is established upon God's Word...the Word made flesh who dwelt among us. In His government, Jesus is Lord...He is the King, and those who submit to Him are people who abide in and honor His Kingdom and His leadership. Make no mistake, Jesus is the Prince of Peace, but He will not force us to come under His government. We are still free souls. We don't have to live under His government. We are certainly free to live under a different government and submit to different rulers, but we should not expect to find peace there. And that, of course, is what we see all over the world. There is no peace to be found in a world that believes there is no truth. There is no peace when we are constantly adrift, tossed about by the winds and waves of every cultural fad. Most importantly, there is no other government or ideology that will give you peace with God.

In the end, what every soul longs for more than anything else is peace with God. You may not even know that your soul longs for peace with God, but you do...we all do. Friends, we are not accidental, impersonal machines that randomly evolved over billions of years. That is a lie. We are personal, moral, intelligent creatures who bear the image of our personal, moral, intelligent Creator. The Bible states that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made", and it doesn't take a great deal of insight to observe the truth in that statement. Our bodies reveal a genius level of design, and design comes only from the hand of the Designer. Even so, because of our sin, our beautiful minds and bodies are broken, and so is our society...because of our sin, we are estranged from God...we all know that is true. And sadly, no amount of worldly pleasures, distractions, good works, or successes will accomplish peace with God.

Because our souls are rebellious and full of sin, we fear and even disdain the government of God. We fight to be autonomous and create narratives to convince ourselves that God doesn't even exist. We choose to submit our souls under a different government, or God-forbid, we declare our souls to be self-governed. This is what it means to walk in darkness. If God is the light, we want nothing to do with Him because His light only reveals our darkness and the infinite gap between God's holiness and our corruption. Is there any wonder, then, that we have no peace? To be separated from God...to be alienated from God...to be subject to some ruthless "other" who doesn't love us and will never forgive us...we are by nature those who walk in darkness, and there is no peace in that darkness.

But Jesus came as our Prince of Peace...as a Great Light to those who walk in darkness... because Jesus makes peace with God possible, even as He provides peace for our souls in a troubled world. I'll tell you more about that peace in a minute, but make no mistake: the peace that our souls long for comes only to those who are under our Lord's governance. If we refuse to yield to King Jesus, we remain at odds with His Kingdom and His Kingship, and we should not expect to find or experience peace. In fact, when Jesus said "I have not come to bring peace but division," He was referring to His government. The government of King Jesus will never

compromise or align itself with the governments and rulers of this world. But if you long for peace in your life, there is only one government that will suffice—there is only one Lord who provides peace—and that is the government of Jesus...the Prince of Peace...who provides peace with God in a troubled world. And that leads me to my second subheading:

II. Peace with God in a Troubled World

Many of you know that in a few weeks I will resume our journey through the book of Ephesians, and we will be returning to Ephesians 2:11-22. In that text we find one of the most powerful, succinct passages regarding the work Jesus did to make peace with God possible. Beginning with vs. 13 Paul writes:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He himself is our peace, who has made us both [Jew and Gentile] one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

When Jesus came into the world, He came with a mission: to reconcile God and man. Through His atoning work on the cross, Jesus made peace with God possible through the forgiveness of sins. This is the Gospel of grace; it is our source of peace. And it is a peace that empowers us to make peace with one another.

The great Charles Spurgeon writes:

The peace meant here is “the deep tranquility of a soul resting on God,” the quiet restfulness of spirit which is the peculiar gift of God, and the choice privilege of the believer.

The deepest, best, and most worthy peace of the soul is its rest towards the Lord God himself. We are no longer afraid of God: the sin which divided us from him is blotted out, and the distance which it created has ceased to be. The atonement has wrought perfect reconciliation and established everlasting peace. The terrors of God’s law are effectually removed from us, and instead thereof we feel the drawings of his love. We are brought nigh by the atoning sacrifice, and have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Before we are saved by the Prince of Peace, we cannot help but think that God is angry with us. God’s law...known also as the universal moral law or the natural law...is a constant reminder of our failure...our guilt and our shame. We feel judged by God and God’s people and we feel hopeless of making things right. That leads to despair, so we either wear ourselves out by trying to be good enough to make things right with God, or we just walk away from God altogether, hoping that perhaps God doesn’t exist and we are not moral creatures after all. Neither path will bring us peace, and that is because there is no peace with God without the Prince of Peace making intercession for us through His death on the cross. When we understand that we have been forgiven in Christ...that our debt has been paid...that we have been saved by grace...that the Father now looks upon our souls as those who have no sin because the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us, then the way we think about God changes completely. Spurgeon goes on to write:

We know that all his thoughts to us are now thoughts of love, and we bless his name that our thoughts toward him are no longer those of the slave towards a taskmaster, or of a criminal towards a judge, but those of a beloved child towards a kind and tender father. Fervent love reigns in our hearts, casting out all fear and causing us to joy in God by our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a great blessing. It is surely a choice delight for a man to know that whether he

prospers or is afflicted, whether he lives or dies, there is nothing between God and him but perfect [friendship]; for all that offends has been effectually put away.

Friends, listen to me: The deepest most satisfying peace you will ever experience is peace with God. When your soul finds peace in your relationship with God, everything else in this life finds its place...even suffering and loss. When we finally know and believe that God truly loves us...that He loves us so much that He gave us His Son...then we can rest, no matter the circumstances.

One of my favorite verses is Matthew 11:28 when Jesus says, “Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Jesus provides rest for weary souls; He gives us HIS peace.

In John 14:27 Jesus said:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Because of the peace of Christ, our hearts need not be troubled or afraid. Our hearts can rest in Him. Now...does that mean we will have no more troubles? Of course not. John writes in John 1: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...but there’s still darkness, right?

Jesus was very honest and clear about our time in this life. He told His disciples in John 16:33: I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Notice that our peace comes from being IN JESUS, because although we will face tribulations in this world, Jesus has overcome the world. If we are in Jesus, we will have His peace...and His peace will provide the power we need to overcome the world.

Some of you know that last Sunday we had a very disturbing occurrence of vandalism at our SKC location during the worship service. Horrible, blasphemous things were written on our walls, tables, pieces of art, and Bibles. After a brief investigation, we identified the vandal, and when I met with that person on Monday morning, I remembered what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the forces of evil in the heavenly places.” This young person was a pawn, manipulated by the Enemy to write words and curses that could not possibly have emanated from this person’s own thoughts and feelings. I immediately recognized that my battle was not with a person...my battle was with Evil itself. I could discern the Evil that wanted to devour this young person, and I discovered a righteous anger and a determination to fight evil on this person’s behalf. I want you to know something: not only did the peace of Christ sustain me in that fight...the peace of Christ burned like a fire within my soul. I felt His presence; I experienced His power; and I truly believe that Jesus moved through me to do battle on behalf of this person’s soul. That’s what the peace of Christ does in the heart of the believer...it empowers

us to have peace and rest in Christ, even as we contend for peace and rest for those who are hurting. We are empowered to overcome the world.

Let me close now with my very brief third subheading:

III. The Person of Peace

Friends, we are going to live in a state of chronic disappointment if we come to think of peace as “a state of affairs.” Too many of us have come to believe that if God really loved us, He would wave His hand and all the evil people would go away and there would be peace on earth...as in the total absence of conflict. Need I remind you that if God waved His hand and rid the world of evil people, there would be no people left on the planet? If you are pretty sure that you are a person without sin, please raise your hand and we’ll be sure to get you into treatment for narcissism! Church, we have all sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, amen? As long as there are people, there will be conflict...that is as certain as death and taxes.

Please do not look for peace as a state of affairs; rather, remember that the Bible presents peace as a person. Jesus is our Peace. He is the Prince of Peace. He is source of our Peace. He is the provider of His peace. He is the means by which peace with God is possible. Jesus is our Shalom...He makes us complete, He makes us whole, He provides our tranquility.

If you lack peace in your life, I cannot urge you strongly enough to call upon the name of Jesus in faith. Jesus is not dead; He is very much alive, and His Spirit is present with us even now. He is the provider and perfecter of peace, and He quickly and consistently responds to those who call upon His name in faith.

Again, I must quote the great Charles Spurgeon who writes:

When he comes very near your heart and lays bare his wounds, and speaks his love home to you, making you feel its divine fervency, when he assures you that you are one with him, united to him in an everlasting wedlock, which knows of no divorce — then it is that your soul is steeped in peace. This is an experimental business and no mere words can express it. “The Lord of peace himself give you peace,”— this, I say, he does mainly by manifesting himself to the heart of his servants.

Friends, Jesus came to the world not only to save us from our sin, but to have a personal relationship with each one of us. That relationship is available for those who will humble themselves and repent of the sin that has separated them from God. As we call upon Jesus, He comes to us...the Lord of peace who gives us peace...because He gives us Himself. I would invite you this evening to call upon the name of our Prince...the Prince of Peace. Call upon the name of Jesus, and you will come to know why Christmas is such a big deal after all. The Light has come into the world for those of us who have been walking in darkness. That Light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Come Lord Jesus, Come Prince of Peace
Deliver us from darkness we pray...Amen