

## **Prince of Peace**

### **Isaiah 9:1-7**

We will be continuing our Advent series this morning and to get into our theme, I want to go back and think a little bit about the origins of human history and something that was lost in the Garden of Eden. The book of Genesis begins with two chapters about the creation of the world and everything in it, including human beings. (Picture) God created a man and woman and put them in a beautiful garden where they enjoyed perfect peace – peace with God, peace with his creation, peace with one another, and peace within their very own souls. They didn't know anything other than peace.

But chapter 3 tells about the destruction of that peace. Satan, in the form of a serpent, came into the Garden and convinced Adam and Eve to disobey God. And when they did, their peace was ruined in every way. (Picture) They no longer had peace with God because of their sin, and along with that they lost their inner peace, peace with one another, and peace with God's creation. The curse of sin was upon humanity and there have been terrible consequences ever since.

From that point forward, the Old Testament tells about a world without peace. It started with the murder of Abel by his brother Cain right away in Genesis 4, and by the time you get to Genesis 6, it says that hatred, violence and corruption were so bad that God was sorry he made mankind and chose to blot them from the face of the earth, except for Noah and his family. (Picture) But even after the flood, the world filled with violence and strife as the corrupting effects of sin continued to spread.

It was into this world that God began to carry out a plan by which he would restore peace on earth, and the people of Israel were right in the middle of it. God chose Abraham and his descendants to be the ones through whom he would reveal and carry out his plan. But rather than listening and trusting and waiting for it to unfold, they disobeyed and walked in rebellion. This led to their eventual downfall and deportation to Babylon as we've see in previous weeks. Like every other nation on earth, they didn't have peace with God, one another, the people around them, or in their very own souls.

But it was while they were there in Babylon that they began to pay attention to a prophecy in Isaiah that spoke of God's plan to restore peace on earth – a peace that would spread into every area of their lives and go on forever. That's the prophecy we've been looking at this month and today we come back to it again. It speaks of a coming king who would deliver his people – a king with four names. We've looked at the first three in previous weeks and today we look at the fourth and final one: Prince of Peace. I want to look at what that name meant and how Jesus is restoring peace to this world.

I'm going to read the whole passage with this prophecy in it so we can see how peace is central to it.

Read Isaiah 9:1-7.

*But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*

*<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. <sup>3</sup> You 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

*<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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 to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

As the people in exile read and believed this, I think it would have brought a deep sigh of relief. They were desperate for peace and maybe didn't even know how badly they needed it. We've seen what the other names in Isaiah 9:6 would have meant to them and how significant they would be, but this last one seems to be more central to the main idea of this whole passage. The people of Israel were in misery and darkness because of sin, but a king was coming to bring peace.

The Prince of Peace... I looked up those words to make sure I had the right idea in mind and I didn't at first because of my understanding of the word "prince." We understand prince to be the son of a king – so we have Prince Edward, or Prince Charles. And Jesus is the son of a King, but that's not the idea being conveyed in this title. To the ancient Hebrew reader, the word used for "prince" in this passage actually meant what we would understand as "captain" or "general" of an army. It refers to a military commander. And it's something that the people of Israel were all too familiar with. At that point in history they had faced many military commanders, and one thing they all had in common was that they were captains of war, captains of armies, captains of enemy forces that had come and destroyed their lives. Those "princes" brought terrible strife and terror and destroyed their peace.

But this prophecy in Isaiah was of a different kind of commander – one they had never encountered before, a Captain of Peace... In the same way that all the other captains had brought war, soldiers, fighting, and bloodshed, this captain would bring peace. There's a children's song that says, "I've got peace like a river..." and that's a good way to look at it. (Picture) The Messiah wouldn't bring soldiers, war, and terror to invade the nations, he would bring peace like a river that would flow into every area of our lives and fill us with peace. He would undo what was done in the Garden and reverse all the devastating effects of sin. His would be a kingdom of peace.

The people of Israel would have been longing for such a king, and I think we all do as well. All of our lives have been affected by the destruction of peace. There's the problem with our relationship with God and what sin has done to it. We feel separation and judgment and guilt and shame. There's the disruption of inner peace because of all the things that bring conflict, stress, fear and anxiety. There's tension in relationships – marriage, family, friends, people at work, people in our neighborhoods. It's a weight we feel that stems all the way back to the Garden and we long to be free of. We long for a Prince of Peace, and that's who Jesus is.

When Jesus was born, it says this in Luke 2:13-14: *"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'"*

I want to quickly walk through some of the ways Jesus has restored peace here on earth. The first was to restore peace with God. There are several passages that explain how he did that and one is Romans 3:23-25: *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”*

There are some big words in there, but basically Paul is saying that God removed the curse of sin which separated us from him, and the way he did that was to pay the penalty for our sin, through Christ’s death on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, he absorbed God’s wrath for sin so that through faith in him our sins could be forgiven and we could be declared righteous by God. Jesus’ death restored us to a place of peace with God. It’s called reconciliation. Colossians 1:19-22 says, *“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,<sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”*

Jesus reconciled us to God and now we have peace with him. That was our biggest need, but the restoration of peace on earth didn’t end there. Once we had peace with God it opened the way for us to have peace in many other ways as well. One of those is inner peace, or peace in our souls. A big part of inner peace comes when we are reconciled to God and released from bondage to guilt and shame. There’s a freedom that we feel deep inside when we know that God is for us, not against us and instead of being his enemies we are friends – beloved sons and daughters. And that brings peace.

But Jesus has done even more than that to restore our inner peace. When Jesus told his disciples he would be leaving them, they were deeply troubled, and this is what he said to them in John 14:26-27: *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.<sup>27</sup> 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.”*

I think Jesus was reassuring them that things were going to be ok because he wasn't going to leave them alone, he would give them the Holy Spirit, and with his presence in their lives would have Jesus' peace. When the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us he brings peace. Galatians 5:22 says, "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...*" and it goes on from there. The Holy Spirit doesn't just make us feel peace, he IS peace, and when he lives inside of us, we are able to experience that peace. As we learn to let go of fear and anxiety and let him fill us, we can experience peace.

I think this is what Paul was getting at in Philippians 4:5-7: "*The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" This is a peace that surpasses understanding – it doesn't make sense, because it comes from the Spirit of God living inside us and can be present even when circumstances aren't that great.

So Christ restores peace with God and peace in our inner being, now let's think of how he restores peace in our relationships with other people. A big part of the destruction of peace comes from conflict with other people – tension in your marriage, problems with people at work, a neighbor who drives you crazy, an enemy who's out to get you. How can Christ bring peace with all the problems we face in relationships? We might hope that he'll answer our prayers to change the other person. Sometimes he does, but oftentimes I think he wants to change you. And I think he wants you to become more like him. And then you'll find peace.

That's the direction Paul points in Philippians 2:1-8: "*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (That's what peace looks like with other people. How is that possible?) <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (I have to pay attention to other people, even those I'm in conflict with, and be willing to serve them! How am I supposed to do that?) <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the*

*form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

It's possible to lower ourselves for the sake of others and have peace because we have been given the mind of Christ. Christ is in us and he wants to live through us and if we humble ourselves before him and allow him to do that, we will have more and more peace in our relationships with others.

Jesus is our Prince of Peace, bringing us peace with God, peace within ourselves, and peace with other people, and someday, when he returns, he will bring his kingdom of peace here on earth in all its fullness and there will be no more fighting, no more political division, no more racial hatred, and no more war.

On that day, Isaiah 11:6-9 says, *"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.<sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.<sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.<sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."*

I greatly look forward to that day, but even now we can rejoice because of our Prince of Peace.