

Advent: He Shall Be Called...The Prince the Peace, 12/22/19

It is fitting to end this advent series the Sunday before Christmas talking about the Prince of Peace. Everyone knows that Christmas is about Peace. You will find it on most Christmas cards. This is the theme of most Christmas Carols, it is the nostalgic image of the nativity- the baby Jesus in the manger, all is calm...all is mild- sleep in heavenly peace. But what is this peace of Christmas all about? Is it just about a calm, mild, sleepy, nostalgic feeling? Is it a hopeful sense that maybe next year will be more peaceful and less stressful than this one? Oh, it is far deeper, powerful, and far reaching than that...and unfortunately most people miss it. So let's not miss it this Christmas.

Today in this fourth and final title of Jesus that we find in prophesied about in Isaiah 9:6 we want to see what kind of peace the Prince of Peace has come to give the world and how we can get it. First let's unpack this title.

When we think of a "prince" a variety of images come to mind- Prince William and Harry, Prince Charming from Cinderella...or maybe the late artist formerly known as Prince. But this title "Prince" is not some guy born with a silver spoon living in a lush palace that we romanticize in our fairytales and pop culture. This Hebrew word is better translated ruler or commander. It is most often used to describe a military commander who has power, authority and leadership over his army.

Joshua 5:13-14

¹³ Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" ¹⁴ "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in worship.

Who is this Prince... this Commander of the army of the LORD that Joshua worships? A pre-incarnate Jesus. That's for another sermon, but the point is, that is the image of SAR- "Prince". Jesus is the commander and ruler. Second word- This is a beautiful word- this word in its verbal form means to fill in or repair the cracks. Every Christmas at my parents I am reminded of the ceramic Christmas tree when I cracked the top half and we had to "shalom it." Some of you wish I didn't mention that...Shalom is repairing, restoring wholeness and harmony to something. It assumes that is something broken, something fractured and not right that is in need of shalom. This title implies that the work of Jesus as the commander will be to go to war to restore what is broken.

Now that we better understand this- let's talk about what kind of peace this prince went to war to bring in his first advent. What exactly is Christmas Peace? First, we need to be very clear about this and understand what it is NOT.

It is NOT primarily Political Peace. Not military, everyone getting along internationally kind of peace. Over the last 2000 years since Christ came, some would say our world has experienced

more peace. Others would vehemently argue that there has been less peace. Has Christianity brought more peace on earth? Well, yes and no. There has arguably been more bloodshed, violence, oppression and political chaos in the last 2000 years since Christ than before. And before the turn of the 20th century many smart people thought the 1900s would be marked by mankind finally fulfilling its utopian dreams of peace on earth...and instead it turned out to be one of the bloodiest centuries on record. Nobody is saying that anymore... So, if political peace was Jesus' goal in his first advent, then we would have to say he failed miserably.

But Jesus himself said in Matthew 24 that before the end of the world we should expect to see more wars and violence. That doesn't mean Christians shouldn't seek peace. Absolutely-blessed are peacemakers. Now, ultimately there will be an end to all violence and there will be peace on earth and we will get to that. But that is NOT primarily what Christmas Peace is all about.

It is NOT primarily Internal Peace. It is not merely a psychological experience of Everything Zen, not a sense of being carefree, stress free, Hakuna matata...Jesus was many things, but I stress free wasn't one of them. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders, he got angry and sad and his soul was troubled and anxious before his death. The message of Jesus is NOT just love yourself more, get rid of anything that bums you out and try to think positive, happy thoughts. Now is there a peace that surpasses understanding that we can experience in a relationship with Jesus as Philippians- "Peace that surpasses all understanding"? YES absolutely. But that is NOT primary the what Jesus came for in his first advent.

It is NOT primarily Relational Peace. Christmas peace isn't primarily everyone just getting along with each other in your family and forgetting all the things that annoy you about each other for the day, singing Kumbaya. I hope that happens for you. Here's a verse that you never hear at Christmas. Listen to what Jesus said.

Luke 12:51-53

⁵¹ Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. ⁵² From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.

⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

Why doesn't this make it onto the Hallmark Christmas Card? Don't give this one to your in-laws this Christmas and tell them that they have fulfilled Jesus' prophecy for you. What is Jesus saying? This gospel of Jesus has the potential to bring radical upheaval and disturbance to the religious and cultural and familial norms of a society. Why? The gospel rejects religion that says "do these things and God has to accept you." In Eastern cultures it means you refuse to pay homage or worship an idol in a temple or in a home which may bring division. It causes offense to say, "you are a sinner and there is only one way to the Father and it is through the blood of

Jesus shed for you.” There will be people mad at you because of your faith...sometimes within your own family. Now, can the gospel bring families together, give you a power to be at peace and forgive? Absolutely. But that is not the primarily what he came.

So Christmas Peace is not political, it's not internal, it's not relational peace. “Thanks Nate, you've ruined Christmas for me.” Friends it's something so much bigger and better. It is the peace, the restoration that is most essential and yet most people don't think they need it. Everyone sings it during Christmas time, most having no clue what it is actually saying- **Hark the Herald Angels Sing- “Peace on earth, mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled.”** Jesus came to bring shalom, restoration between God and man, between creation and creator. This is our most neglected and most essential kind of peace we need.

Ephesians 2:14, 16-18

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Peace is a really big deal to Jesus, it is why he came...but it wasn't free. We all want peace on earth don't we? During the Third Reich in Nazi Germany, the world wanted to bring peace to the violent reign of Hitler... but in order to get it, we had to go to war. It would come at the cost of millions of lives. Peace isn't free and sometimes requires war. The Commander, Jesus had to go to war to bring us peace and restore our relationship with God. He went to war with the hosts of hell. He went to war against the false religion of man. He went to war against your rebellion and mine. As the prophet Isaiah **53:5** spoke- **“His punishment brought us peace, by his wounds we are healed.”**

Now that we understand what Christmas Peace is all about, I want to speak to two kinds of people here today. First kind, there are those who are seeking political, internal or relational peace this Christmas but **don't have peace with God**. You desire a subjective, temporary peace, which is a good and noble pursuit. But you are neglecting what is essential...the objective, eternal peace with your creator. And while you may get many presents this Christmas...God has given you the only gift you actually need- Peace through Jesus Christ. The secret to receiving this gift of peace this Christmas is to admit that you are at war with God. You can only receive a gift if you believe you need it. If you get an iPhone 8 for Christmas but you have an 11, you put it back in the box. If you have a full head of hair and you get Rogaine, you are offended...put it back in the box and exchange it. I don't need this. Most people don't think they are at war with God.

Rom. 8:7

The natural mind is enmity against God. It will not submit to God's law. Indeed it cannot.

Radical statement. Our natural state outside for the work of the prince of peace, is hostility toward God and it has been this way since the Fall.

Tim Keller: "The primary condition of our hearts is not ignorance so that you need education or indifference so that you need motivation, but rather hostility so that you need reconciliation."

Sometimes this hostility with God is overt...Think of a couple who used to be in love and now they have become estranged...There is thick hostility. When they were in love there were characteristics they loved about each other. **Blank Slide** But now in their anger and their hurt, they read those same characteristics as flaws. They loved that their spouse was a details person, now see as critical spirit who controls everything. Loved that their spouse was unflappable, now you see it as cold and stubborn. Loved that they were carefree and spontaneous, now you see it as untethered and unreliable. They can only see the negative about that person and are hardened to the positive.

Sometimes hostility with God is overt and we know it. The sovereignty of God we see as unaccountability, the grace of God is too easy and we think it should be earned, his justice is harshness. His morality is restriction and narrowness. The fact that we can't control God leads us to say, "How can I believe in a God who let this happen?"

But often it's covert and subtle enmity. When people say, I'm not God's enemy...it is most of the time because they have created a God in their own image. It is not the God of the Bible, it is some tamed, controllable, generic god that we can all kind of get along with and doesn't offend anyone's sensibilities. But if you knew the God of the Bible, would wouldn't be indifferent because he disagrees with you and me quite a bit and holds us accountable for how we live.

But maybe the most offensive way we display our enmity is by usurping his rightful rule, becoming our own gods. We run our own lives, we do it our way, by our rules, morality...we may sprinkle in some church, some giving, some singing songs and prayers a day a week or at dinnertime. But the rest of the time- we are the Commander, the Prince of our own lives. And this is the ultimate form of hostility. You are playing a game of thrones with God.

Are you ready to admit that you are at war with God? And all the attempts at finding inner peace with yourself, forgiving yourself...all your attempts at keeping peace with others are just masking your greatest need. Peace that is offered in Jesus Christ this Christmas.

Romans 5:10

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Second kind of person, is the one who has **peace with God but isn't experiencing peace internally or relationally**. Maybe you aren't at peace with yourself. You can't forgive yourself, you struggle with guilt over your past or how that affects others. Maybe you experience self-loathing. Or you aren't at peace with others. There is an ongoing tension under the surface that

no one talks about and tries to avoid...just to get through the holidays. Or there is someone you can't forgive, you won't forgive. You are holding their offense over them and saying to them, "You owe me." Maybe you are estranged from your family and Christmastime just makes it even worse. You have a peace with God, you are a Christian- but you can't say your life is characterized by the experience of peace. Is there an experiential Peace that Jesus provides?

The good news is absolutely yes. In fact, Christmas Peace- Peace with God that Jesus gives, opens the flood gates to experiential peace. Listen to this little verse- **Colossians 3:15 *Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts.***

Here is the beauty of that little command. It is a passive command...it is not something you do, it is something you yield to. It is not something you achieve, it is something that Christ wants to do in you. It is not raising the bar for yourself, it is raising the white flag. Surrender to the prince of peace. He wants to come and take over. He wants to go to war against the self-loathing with the power of the gospel that says you are loved unconditionally by the only one who's opinion really matters. You have peace with God, you are accepted, you are forgiven, you are his child and he offers self-forgiveness and a new identity in Christ. Will you let him rule your heart?

The Prince of Peace wants to go to war against the resentment and bitterness and lack of forgiveness against someone that is ruling your heart. Will you let him rule so that you are empowered to release that person from the grip of resentment. But he can't if you refuse to let him do the work.

Will you let the peace of Christ rule in your heart?

But what about Peace on Earth and Good will toward men? Isn't that what the angels said? Here is the amazing thing, the primary need we all have is peace with God and the Prince of Peace makes that possible. This is why he came in the first advent. The same Prince of Peace, is coming again in his second advent. And when he does he will fulfill this promise of peace on earth.

Isaiah 9:7

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. 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.

When the Prince of Peace comes he will establish political, international, relational peace forever. No more wars, corrupt leaders and coups and terrorism, no more tribalism, and nationalism... no need for a military. There will be no need for politicians and no need for democrats and republicans, conservatives and liberals...no impeachments. No racism, no more divorce, abuse, abandonment, isolation, estranged relationships and self-loathing. In the end, the Prince of Peace wins. And so may you experience the fullness of Christmas Peace offered in Jesus Christ.

