

## **PRINCE OF PEACE**

## **ISAIAH 9:6-7**

When he was a young man, Joshua Liebman made a list of the things he would like to have. It included such things as good health, love, talent, power wealth and fame. He showed this list to several other folk asking for their opinion. A wise, old friend of the family looked the list over and said, "Joshua, this is an excellent list. But it appears you've omitted the most important element of all. You've forgotten one ingredient, lacking which, each other possession becomes a hideous torment, and your list as a whole, an intolerable burden." Liebman asked, "And what is that missing ingredient?" The friend replied by taking a pencil and crossing out Liebman's entire list. Then he wrote across the page three words: "peace of mind." Joshua Liebman later became the author of an inspiring book which sold millions of copies. The title? "Peace of Mind."

Peace of mind and heart. As we live out the last few days of an old year and look forward to a new year, is there a more fundamental human need? Is there anything quite as elusive or hard to get? During this Christmas season we've been considering just two verses in the Old Testament book of Isaiah that refers to a child that would be born in the future – Isaiah 9:6-7. This child was Jesus, born some 800 years after Isaiah, the prophet, wrote these words. Let's read them together in unison one more time. "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. 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." (Isaiah 9:6-7 NIV)

I've called this message series, "What Child is This?" Isaiah gives four great answers to that question: this Child is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. It's that last name I want you to think with me about today. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. The title "prince" suggests someone who has authority and power. In other words, Jesus has the clout as well as the ability to provide peace of mind and heart. And the peace He provides is a peace that surpasses human understanding. Let me underline two eternal truths about Jesus as the Prince of Peace today. First of all:

### **ONLY JESUS GIVES YOU PEACE WITH GOD.**

Peace with God. First, the peace Jesus gives is comprehensive. So much of what passes for peace these days is partial, temporary and limited. Whenever we hear that word "peace", we tend to think of it in terms of wars or conflicts between countries or groups of people coming to an end. I read somewhere that only 8% of the time since the beginning of recorded history has the world been entirely at peace. So for every 1000 years of human history, there might be 80

years when one group of people wasn't trying to kill off another group. That means from the birth of Jesus, our world has had maybe 160 years of peace.

As followers of Jesus, we believe that only Jesus will ever bring true, lasting peace to this world. The Bible teaches that fact. And, at the end of it all, God insists on a comprehensive peace. In order to get to comprehensive peace, God has to deal with the most basic conflict of all. The greatest conflicts on our planet are not the wars going on in Iraq or Afghanistan. It's not our war with Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. All conflicts great or small are symptoms of a much greater, deeper conflict. The greatest war is the one between human beings and God. The greatest battlefield is the human heart.

People hate each other and seek to hurt one another – whether at a macro level (country against country) or at a micro level (person against person) – because human beings are at war with God ultimately. It goes back to what the Bible calls sin. Sin is an attitude deeply imprinted into our hearts and minds from birth. Essentially, it's a deep - sometimes unconscious - hostility and aversion to God. Sin manifests itself in our actions and our attitudes – both what we do and fail to do. Our sin has caused this hostile, strained and broken relationship with our Creator. Human beings by nature don't want to submit to God's authority and insist on doing life their own way. The result is personal hatred of and animosity towards others that finds ultimate fulfillment in armed conflict.

You probably know that the Old Testament Hebrew word for "peace" is "shalom." Yes, it can mean the absence of war or the end of conflict. But "shalom" means more than that. It refers to a complete, harmonious, fulfilling and unimpaired relationship with others, with God and even with yourself. "Shalom" is all about comprehensive peace not just physically stopping bullets from flying around. Over two-thirds of the times "shalom" appears in the Bible, it refers to the presence of God in some way. In other words, "shalom" assumes that comprehensive peace depends on God showing up.

Peace with God. Second, the peace Jesus gives is costly. There is usually a cost involved to get to comprehensive peace. In many places, "shalom" refers to the making of some kind of payment to someone who has been wronged – like an act of restitution. God Himself has been wronged by your sin. He's the injured, offended party here. It only seems reasonable to expect that you should have to do something to get back in His good graces. Considering how offensive even one sin is to Holy God, can you begin to imagine what you would have to do? But the Bible's message is very different. Instead of telling you what you owe God and demanding that you pay it, the Bible is the story of how God paid the cost Himself in order to establish this comprehensive peace. Again, why did God take upon Himself human flesh in the person of Jesus? The Incarnation – this event we sing and sermonize about every Christmas - was for one reason and one reason alone – so that Jesus could suffer, die and be raised again from the dead. Your sin and mine created a cost that had to be paid. And it was paid

at the cross and the empty tomb by God Himself. Restitution was provided by God Himself so that true “shalom” could break out.

What does the Bible say? “Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.” (Romans 5:1 NLT) It’s only through Jesus that this war between human beings and God has come to an end. The Bible says, “... [God] made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross.” (Colossians 1:20 NLT) It is only because of Jesus’ death on the cross, that peace between you and God is possible. The Bible says, “...Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. For Christ himself has brought peace to us...” (Ephesians 2:13-14 NLT) Because of the high cost Jesus paid, you and I can experience “shalom” with God – absolute, eternal, comprehensive peace.

Peace with God. Third, the peace Jesus gives is contingent. In other words, peace with God isn’t automatically given or conferred on anyone. Well, how do you get it, then? You must reach out and take it personally and consciously. Peace with God is contingent on actually receiving or accepting this marvelous gift God alone gives. The Bible has a word for receiving or accepting God’s peace. That word is faith. Again, look at this verse: “Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.” (Romans 5:1 NLT) Imagine an exquisitely wrapped Christmas gift with your name on it. It’s for you. You can open it any time you want. But that gift only benefits you if you take it, open it and start enjoying it. God’s personal gift to you is peace with Him. But you have to receive that gift and make it your own by what the Bible calls faith.

Some of us are going to someone else’s home for Christmas dinner this Thursday. Imagine yourself arriving and wishing your host a merry Christmas. You can see the dining room from where you’re standing. The table is set for a grand feast. Your nose tells you something delicious is cooking. Then your host says, “Well, it’s time to eat. Come on into the dining room and have a seat.” At this very point, you politely refuse. “No, I can’t believe you’ve made Christmas dinner,” you say. “You’re either trying to pull a joke on me or you’re suffering from a delusion. I’m going to just sit out here in the living room.” Everyone laughs a bit nervously at your odd sense of humor. But after repeatedly urging and inviting you to come in, sit down and eat with them, they finally shake their heads, shrug their shoulders, lose their patience and just let you sit out there by yourself. Christmas dinner is held. Christmas dinner is eaten and enjoyed. Christmas dinner’s a fact even though it never became a fact for you personally. The only way to change the situation is to admit that you’re all wrong, accept the fact that dinner is truly being offered, and get in there before it’s all gone!

God has invited you to a spiritual feast – a feast of His love, His forgiveness, His joy and His life eternal. All that and more is offered to you by receiving the gift of

peace with God. But that peace is contingent on your faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Every person on the planet is in one place or another. Either you're on the outside saying, "There's no such thing. It can't be true." Or, you're inside enjoying the feast of God's presence and peace, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner through Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ." What Child is this? His Name is Prince of Peace! Here's another great truth about Him.

### **ONLY JESUS GIVES YOU THE PEACE OF GOD.**

The peace of God. First, the peace Jesus gives is conditional. Conditional on what? It's conditional on whether you've made peace with God first of all. The peace of God depends entirely on peace with God. Peace with God always precedes the peace of God. The peace of God is an inner sense of well being, wholeness and spiritual completeness that pervades your entire life. You know your sins are forgiven. You know God loves you. You know your life has purpose and meaning. You know heaven is your eternal home. You can only have all of that if, first of all, you've made your peace with God.

Why do so many people feel downright terrible inside? Guilt - like a two ton ball and chain around their hearts. Lack of any real purpose - like an endlessly dripping faucet. Little sense of self worth - like you're just a big, empty zero. Anxiety and dread about the future - like a tsunami rushing towards you and you can't escape. You get no lasting relief from any of that without first getting peace with God. I'm not saying you'll never have happy moments in life if you choose not to be a follower of Jesus. But that's just the problem. The best you can hope for is just a few moments of happiness - here and there, sporadic at best, limited and temporary. That's why you see so many folk trying to extend those few moments of fleeting happiness by overindulging in alcohol, taking drugs, having sex with someone new, climbing the corporate ladder or by buying a new, expensive adult toy of some kind. Much of it's an attempt to get this inner peace somehow. But the peace of God is contingent on peace with God.

The peace of God is contingent for a follower of Jesus, too. You mean, it's not automatic and perpetual for God's children? No! True, you can't lose your peace with God - that whole spiritual reality of an eternal relationship with God based on His grace. But you can most certainly lose that sense of having the peace of God. When? Whenever you sin, you lose the peace of God. Whenever you make a poor decision, cop an ungodly attitude, engage in a sinful act or fail to show love, God will withdraw that sense of His peace. That's His way of getting your attention. At first, you may just feel upset inside, out of kilter or as if you're suddenly distant from God. When that happens, get alone with God. Ask Him if there's something you need to confess. If there is, He'll show you. Or, it may be that you're about to make a decision or pursue some course of action that isn't sinful in and of itself, but it just isn't what God wants for your life. God often uses the presence or the absence of His peace to give you insight and leading into His will for your life.

The peace of God. Second, the peace Jesus gives is comforting. It's really the only remedy that works when you're faced with life's many anxieties, pressures and stresses. Are you a "worry wart"? I'm reminded of this old man and his friend standing on a crowded bus. A third man – a younger one – stood next to them and asked, "What time is it?" But the older man refused to reply. So the young man shrugged and moved on. The old man's friend asked, "Why on earth were you so rude to that young man who asked you what time it was?" The old man answered, "Well, if I'd given him the time of day, then next he would want to know where I'm going. Then we might end up talking about our interests and finding out we had a lot in common. If we did that, he might invite himself to my house for dinner. Then, he'd meet my lovely daughter. And if they met, they might fall in love. And I don't want my daughter marrying someone who can't even afford a watch!" That's a "worry wart!" What can go wrong will go wrong!

Why is God's peace so comforting? It's based entirely on Himself. When you're facing times of great stress and you just feel the anxiety level creeping up inside, you must remind yourself, "Now look here. I'm a child of God. Jesus made it possible for me to have peace with God. Because I've put my trust in Jesus, I can also have the peace of God. Anxiety will not govern me. I will not be a slave to fear. The future is not something to fear but to embrace because God is there." That's the Bible's message: "Don't worry about anything (by the way, that can be translated – 'stop perpetually worrying about even one thing'-); instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7 NLT) Someone explained it like this: "Satan tries to crush our spirit by getting us to bear tomorrow's problems with only today's grace." Have you been there? I know I have!

Here's another important aspect of prayer. You tell God about your fears and release them to Him. "The peace of God that passes all understanding" - I love that phrase. It means God's peace is beyond your ability to understand or to produce. It's God's gift to you right in the midst of turmoil, pain, uncertainty and heartache. God's Word promises, "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you... And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts..." (Isaiah 26:3, Colossians 3:15 NLT) In other words, let it control, dominate, overrule, bash into submission – every fear, every anxiety, every worry. Perhaps Jesus Himself put it best, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (John 16:33 NLT)

The peace of God. Finally, the peace Jesus gives is conquering. Sometimes I catch myself assuming that the peace of God means I have no problems, no struggles or no challenges. Not so! God's peace is like a weapon – like armor. "...His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7 NLT) God's peace is the result of knowing God is still there

even when life becomes bleak or goes black for whatever reason. The peace of God enables you to endure, to prevail and to conquer.

Horatio Spafford was a happy, prosperous and successful attorney in Chicago. He had five children, was active in his church and had a personal friendship with D.L. Moody – the Billy Graham of the 1800s. But then he began to experience tragedy on a Job-like scale. His only son died. Soon after that loss, the Chicago fire of 1871 wiped out his extensive real estate holdings. Only two years later, yet another unbearable tragedy came his way. In November of 1873, Spafford planned a European trip for his family. At the last minute, urgent business detained him from leaving with his family. So he placed his wife and four young daughters – Tanetta, Maggie, Annie and Bessie – on the *S.S. Ville du Havre*. He planned to join them as soon as his business was completed. A few days out of port the *Ville du Havre* was struck by another ship. In just twelve minutes time, the *Ville du Havre* sank and 226 people drowned. Mrs. Spafford was among the few who were saved and who ultimately arrived in Cardiff, Wales. Once there, Mrs. Spafford cabled a two word message to her husband: “Saved. Alone.”

Horatio Spafford booked passage immediately to join his wife in Wales. Hour after endless hour he stood on the ship’s deck bent over with sorrow. He had asked the captain to alert him when they reached the approximate place where the *Ville du Havre* had gone down. At the appropriate time, the captain sent word they were now passing over the place where Spafford’s daughters had drowned. Never again would he hear their childish laughter. Never again would he hear their loving greeting, “Papa!” Never again would he feel the warmth of his precious daughters’ hugs. Never. On that cold, wind swept sea in November of 1873, Horatio Spafford pulled from his coat pocket his wife’s cabled message: “Saved. Alone.” He turned the paper over and began to write these words, “When peace, like a river, attendeth my way; when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.”

I hope I never have to experience loss like that. I hope you don’t either. But regardless of what life brings your way and mine, I know this: Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Only He can give you and me peace with God. Only He can give you and me the peace of God come what may. Only He can give you the strength to stand firm and with His help say, “It is well, it is well with my soul.” What Child is this? His Name is Prince of Peace.