Coming to Terms with Christmas: Peace Memory Verse: Isaiah 26:3

Dec. 8th, 2024 Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

**SLIDE 1**

 As we continue in this time of Advent, as we come nearer to the arrival of Jesus, we find ourselves using big Christmas words. Last week we discussed “hope” and today we turn to “peace”. It’s important to take some time to carefully consider what we truly mean when we use these words. Language is flippant and talk is cheap, but during this season, maybe we can restore some weight to these important words as we come to terms with Christmas.

**SLIDE 2**

 The word “peace” has a very broad application. To an ambassador, it means the cessation of hostilities, a ceasefire, an end to war between two countries. To the overwhelmed parent it means a few minutes of quiet, a quelling of the chaos. To the free spirited beatnik it means a general stress-free approach to life…”peace man”. To the family who lost a loved one, it means their family member is in a better place, home in heaven. They are now “at peace”. To the crying baby it means a pat on the back, a kiss on the head that allows them to finally drift off to sleep. Maybe you have used the word recently in an even different way from all these mentioned options. Peace does have many facets of meaning, but what does it mean when it comes to Christmas?

**SLIDE 3**

 Is it really just another way of expressing goodwill among men?

 To understand the biblical meaning of terms, we need to begin with the original language. So what is the word for “peace” in Hebrew? I am sure you all know it even if you don’t know you know it.

**SLIDE 4**

 *Shalom. Shalom* is a typical greeting even in Israel today. It expresses a general friendliness. Instead of saying “hello” they greet one another by saying “peace”. “Peace be upon you, I wish you peace.” But *shalom* does not mean hello. It is actually a word used to describe something that is whole or complete.

**SLIDE 5**

 Job 5:24 in the CEB reads “You will know that your tent is secure. You will examine your home and miss nothing.” “Secure” in this verse is *shalom*. Nothing is missing, everything is in it place, your home is complete. But peace goes deeper than material things. It also refers to relationships. To reconcile a broken relationship is to bring *shalom.* In other words, what was once broken has been made complete.

**SLIDE 6**

 This is the grounding for the Christian use of this word. When it comes to Christmas, “peace” is all about Jesus, whom we call the “Prince of Peace”. But if Jesus is the Prince of Peace and he came thousands of years ago in the little town of Bethlehem, where is his kingdom? Surely his arrival did not bring peace. We still see wars fought around this globe. Death and violence are part of every newscast. Our world is broken and at odds with itself.

**SLIDE 7**

 Where is this peace from this divine Prince? How can we say that Jesus is the Prince of Peace?

 Even within Jesus’ lifetime peace was not apparent. Though Jesus himself was non-violent, the Roman run world around him was far from it. You may have heard the term PAX Romana, that is Latin for “Roman peace”. Historians use it as a term to describe a nearly 200 year period in which Rome was expanding and securing power. The empire was prosperous and stable. And yet, we know this Roman peace only came about through the sword and military might. By conquering other nations, Rome could sit atop the mountain of defeated foes and claim to be at peace.

 Jesus, the Prince of Peace, operates differently.

**SLIDE 8**

 Jesus the Prince of Peace gave up his life on a Roman cross. The status of Rome did not change. Between the Jewish teachers and the Roman government, they got away with murder. Well, of course, the powerful impact of Jesus cannot be ascertained by a historian only. You need the eyes of faith. The apostle Paul explains it in Roman 5:1

**SLIDE 9**

 “Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness combined with our faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

 And there it is! There is the peace that we long for, the peace that we truly need. Peace with God!

**SLIDE 10**

 Wholeness and completeness in our relationship with God. Jesus came into this world, He was born as our Prince of Peace, not to assume some governmental role, not to negotiate with the villains of the world, not even to remove all the things that cause us trouble. Jesus came to make us right with God. He is the first person to ever live who embodied *shalom.*

He was the first complete person, unbroken by the sin that plagues us. That is how Jesus is our Prince of Peace.

**SLIDE 11**

 When we talk about sin, we are not just talking about the wrong things we do or the bad decisions we make. Sin is a sickness that deteriorates us from the inside out. Like a brick wall that begins to crumble because the mortar between the bricks has given way. The very thing that holds the wall together is disintegrating, and slowly but surely, bricks become loose and fall down leaving gaps and openings that should not be. We are like that wall. We have gaps and openings when we could be solid. A wall that is in a state of *shalom* is solid and strong.

**SLIDE 12**

 It’s mortar is precise and even. It’s bricks secure. It is whole and complete. In this sense our Prince of Peace is a lot like a mason…he comes to fix our brokenness; to restore *shalom.*

 As Jesus restores our relationship with God, he begins the process of repairing our brokenness. If we persist in sin, we can never be at peace within ourselves or with God. Sin is at odds with peace. Persisting in sin and trying to be at peace with God is like trying to type out a message while hitting the delete key after every letter. It just does not work. But each of us come into this world broken and crumbling. We all do…but not Jesus. Our Prince of Peace was at peace within himself, at peace with God, and as such, he can bring peace to us as well.

Isaiah 26:3 says, “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in you.” Here is this verse written out in Hebrew.

**SLIDE 13**

יֵצֶר סָמוּךְ, תִּצֹּר שָׁלוֹם שָׁלוֹם:  כִּי בְךָ, בָּטוּחַ

Hebrew reads right to left but you don’t have to know Hebrew to see that there is a word that repeats itself in this verse. The fourth and fifth word from the right repeats. Any guesses on what that word is? *Shalom…*peace. So this verse literally reads:

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יֵצֶר סָמוּךְ, תִּצֹּר שָׁלוֹם שָׁלוֹם:  כִּי בְךָ, בָּטוּחַ

 he trusts in You for peace (in) peace You stayed the mind will keep on You

He will keep you in peace, peace. Here peace has become an adjective describing itself! He will keep you in whole peace, complete peace or as we translate here in English, “perfect peace.” Paul describes it in Philippians 4:7 as the peace that passes all understanding. It’s a peace that is meant to be lived and experienced. It is not meant to be understood or explained.

 Because of Christmas, because Jesus has come, we can have peace that makes no sense. While others might worry and fret, we can rest in the capable and loving hands of our Heavenly Father. While people scrounge and strive, we can face our struggles with confidence that God already has it all take care if. When bad things happen, and our world is shaken, we keep our eyes stayed on him and there we will find peace, peace.

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 Baby Jesus, born in Bethlehem, brought peace, but not as the world gives it. We will still have wars and times of chaos. We will still feel the effects of brokenness, but we keep our eyes stayed on Him. We look forward toward his coming kingdom where all wrongs will be righted and all tears will be dried. Then, the peace we enjoy with God, our spiritual *shalom* will be made manifest. All wars will cease, all suffering will be eased, all relationships will be made whole. All of this will happen when the Prince of Peace finally comes in the fullness of his kingdom.

 So in the meantime, we are here celebrating the coming of this Prince and as we enjoy the peace he brings to our crumbling edifices, we can understand that this peace is not for us alone. I said the same thing about hope last week. We gave out little pocket versions of John’s gospel so we could hand them out and people could be introduced to this hope that we have in Christ. Hope and peace are not for us alone. As we come to a manger and celebrate Christ’s birth, we leave that scene with this mandate:

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Be peacemakers! Writer E. Glenn Hinson sums it well when he says, “The whole Christian mission is a grand peacemaking endeavor!”

 Yes, this means we want to ease suffering and assist people who need help. It means we take care of our surroundings and leave the place better than how we found it. It means controlling the way we speak so we are not stirring up petty arguments. It means defending the weak and vulnerable and giving a voice to the voiceless. It means not insisting on our own way and considering others as better than ourselves. There are many ways peace can be made in our chaotic world. But beyond trying to make peace in our own sphere, we are here to live by a more important directive. Remember the mandate is to be pacemakers. We find what that really means in

**SLIDE 17**

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 READ

 The Prince of Peace reconciles us to God. Paul is writing in Greek here and the word here is …

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*katallage;* reconciliation or to have one’s favor restored. And this word is based on the verb which means to change or in this case, exchange. We see it in verse 21. Jesus did not know sin and yet he became sin for us. He gave us his righteousness in exchange for our sin. Now he has our sin and we have his righteousness. That is the exchange. That is reconciliation. Our favor has been restored and we can be at peace with God.

 So Paul tells us, because this is true, we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God has trusted us with the message of reconciliation. To be a peacemaker then, in the purest form of the word, is to

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 bring people to Christ. “We beg you”, Paul says, “Be reconciled to God!” This is where peace comes from because it’s the only way to deal with sin, it the only way to address our brokenness.

**SLIDE 20**

 I could go down to the rough part of town where the buildings are dilapidated and the mortar is crumbling and the bricks are starting to come out and I could bring along with me some supplies and I could start painting the side of one of those buildings. Maybe I paint a beautiful bright peaceful picture that depicts happiness and wholeness, joy and laughter. After all my hard work, I could stand back and look at my painting and congratulate myself on a job well done. I’m a peacemaker. I can pack up and leave.

 If I did such a thing, no one would say that I actually fixed anything. I covered over some problems that need repair. I made some ugly stuff colorful. But nothing I did actually brought peace, let alone perfect peace. Painting crumbling walls is not our call. Handing out band-aids when the diagnosis is cancer is not our call. We represent Christ. We carry with us his peace that passes understanding, his peace that puts us right with God. This is how we bring peace to a chaotic and broken world. To those we know with addictions we plead,

**SLIDE 21** “Be reconciled to God!” To those suffering from heath issues we plead “Be reconciled to God!” To those struggling with mental health concerns we plead, “Be reconciled to God!” To those stuck in bad relationships or bad surroundings or a bad job, we plead, “Be reconciled to God!”

 This holiday season, I pray that you do sleep in heavenly peace, perfect peace. But as we gather with family and friends, neighbors and whoever else, let us not keep our perfect peace to ourselves. We are ambassadors of the kingdom of our Prince of Peace and we have a message of *shalom* to share: Be reconciled to God! Amen.