

## Prince of Peace

Isaiah 9:6

This is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and we are only a day away from our celebration of Christ's birthday. For the past three Sundays we have used Isaiah 9:6 to help us consider how Christ is our Wonderful Counselor, our Mighty God, and our Everlasting Father. This morning we will ponder the truth that He is also our Prince of Peace.

Let me say at the outset that Christ is the Prince of peace because He is the source of peace. He is the One who makes genuine peace possible. And there are three ways in which Christ does this for His followers. The first way is spoken of in **Romans 4:25-5:1**,

“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. <sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified through faith [in Christ], we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Because of mankind's fall into sin, we are now born at enmity with God. Our sin separates us from God and we cannot fix our sin problem in our own strength or by our own ingenuity. Only by repenting of our sin and trusting in **God's provision** for our sin, can we be brought into **peace with God**. Christ is God's provision for our sin. He is our source of peace with God.

There is another kind of peace that Christ makes possible. Paul refers to it in **Philippians 4:6-7**,

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the **peace of God**, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Only people who have **peace with God** can experience the **peace of God** – which is a peace of mind, an inner calm that comes when we truly embrace that in Christ – God loves us and causes all things to work together for the good of those who love Him.

Is it always easy for Christians to experience the **peace of God**? No. Jesus Himself told us in **John 16:33**, “In the world you will have tribulation [I don’t know about you, but I think Christ got that right]. But take heart; I have overcome the world” [we need to believe that Christ is right about this too]. But it can be difficult to **take heart** when we are in the midst of dark trials. Our natural way of thinking is that sorrow and difficulties are indications that God doesn’t love us. And if Satan can cause us to doubt God’s love and care, then he can rob us of **the peace of God**.

And even when we truly believe that God loves us, it doesn’t take all sorrow out of our lives. We need to remember that when God the Son came into this world, whom the Father loved and was well pleased, He was said to be man of sorrows and acquainted grief [Isaiah 53:3]. But why was Jesus acquainted with grief? Because He was despised and rejected by men, not because He was unloved by God. And because Jesus knew He was loved by God, He was able to gracefully bear being despised by men. The hate that came His way, did not prevent Him from loving His enemies.

In John 16:33, Jesus says we can take heart because He has overcome the world. That truth has a lot to do with Christ being the Prince of Peace.

What does Christ mean when He says that He has overcome the world? In the context of John 16:33, the “world” is referring to a false system of values and beliefs – which are in opposition to God. This fallen world’s system of lies and half truths was masterminded by Satan, who was defeated by Christ at the cross [Hebrews 2:14-15]. Satan suffered defeats in numerous ways because of Christ’s death and resurrection. Jesus speaks of one of those ways in **John 18:37**, “For this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” Truth is what sets people free – free from believing the lies of Satan’s false world system.

The benefits of what Christ accomplished when He crushed Satan’s head at the cross, will be fully known only by people who embrace Christ as their Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace. My soul experiences peace when I realize that if Satan points his accusing finger at Mark Alvis and tells God that I deserve condemnation for my sins, Christ can truthfully say that He has already paid the penalty for my sins and has transferred His righteousness into my account with God. That is why I can take heart in the midst of difficulties and even failures – and why I no longer need to fear death.

There is a third way in which Christ is the Prince of Peace. Jesus spoke about it in **John 14:23**,

“Jesus replied, ‘If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we [God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit] will **come to him** and make our home with him.’”

The Apostle Paul expresses this same truth in **Philippians 4:9**,

“Whatever you have learned . . . from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the **God of peace** will be with you.” Wow, we can have **peace with God** through faith in Christ’s perfect sacrifice for our sins. We can have the profound **peace of God** by believing God loves us and has adopted us into His eternal family. And when we wake up in the morning and our circumstances in life are dark and difficult, and yet we believe, embrace and cherish that the God who created the universe is with us, the **Mighty, Eternal God of peace**.

Friends, if we focus on our problems, it is like this penny, which is really quite small in comparison with all of you wonderful people sitting in the pews. But if I hold this penny close to my eye and shut the other eye, all I can see is the penny. In contrast, if I will keep my eyes opened and hold the penny at a proper distance, then I can see the penny and all of you. If we choose to focus on our problems, we won’t see God. But if we choose to focus on the greatness and love of God, it will keep our problems in proper perspective. This will then allow us to experience the **peace and joy** that Christ has won for us. By the way, **peace and joy** are two sides of the same coin. Joy is peace celebrating and peace is joy at rest. And neither the peace or joy that Christ offers us are dependant upon our circumstances. They are grounded in the person and work of Christ.

And so Christians need peace with God, the peace of God and the God of peace if **we are going to fully experience peace** – AND if **we are going to help others experience peace** in this fallen world.

Helping to extend God’s peace into a fallen world brings us to a turning

point in this message. It is a turning point because of some shocking statements made by Jesus, the Prince of Peace. He made these statements on more than one occasion. Listen to what Christ says in **Matthew 10:34**, “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” He expresses the same truth a little differently in **Luke 12:49-52**,

“I have come to bring fire [judgment] on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup> But I have a baptism to undergo [referring to His crucifixion and death], and how distressed I am until it is completed! <sup>51</sup> Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. <sup>52</sup> From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.”

Is Jesus saying that He is not the Prince of Peace? No. What He is saying is that the peace He brings to this earth comes at a cost. Our **peace with God** was won by Christ at a great cost to Him. And the extension of that peace upon the earth will be costly for us. Just as freedom is not free, neither is peace. The reason for that is because there are two kingdoms operating in this world. One is legitimate, the other is illegitimate. These two kingdoms cannot peacefully coexist. I am speaking about Christ’s kingdom of light versus Satan’s kingdom of darkness [Colossians 1:13]. The battle that rages on the earth, is that fallen people, who desperately need God, are prisoners in Satan’s kingdom of darkness and they continually believe his lies. And because they do, they resist truth and will fight to defend and spread the lies they believe. Christians are not to sit on the sidelines and suck our thumbs. We are in a warfare.

And so what happens when a son becomes a follower of Christ [who is

**truth]** and his father and mother do not? Can they still love each other?

Yes – unless the father and mother are mired so deeply in lies, that they cut off fellowship with their son. One of my professors at Seminary was Jewish. When he became a follower of Christ, his parents had a funeral for him, to let him know that he was dead in their sight. That was extremely painful, but my professor continued to follow Christ because He is Lord and because of what Jesus said in **Matthew 10:37-38**,

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me . . . <sup>38</sup> and anyone who does not take his cross [an implement of suffering] and follow me is not worthy of me.”

Peace comes at a price. Jesus told His disciples that there would be people who believed they were serving God by killing them. What were the disciples to do? Were they supposed to try and kill their persecutors before their persecutors killed them? No. Jesus said when you are persecuted in one city, flee to the next. But what happens when Christ’s followers cannot flee or know they should not flee under their present circumstances? Listen to what Paul says in **Philippians 1:27-29**,

“. . . stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup> without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.”

In this passage Paul was reminding the believers at Philippi and us that we are not to fear those who can only kill our bodies – but cannot touch our souls [Matthew 10:28]. He was also reminding them that they were not to seek revenge against their enemies – because vengeance belongs to

God. Friends, God has always judged the wicked when they cross the line in their wickedness. When unbelievers attack followers of Christ and even put them to death, that is crossing the line. I tell you the truth, I would not want to be in shoes of ISIS right now.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, the greatest persecutors of Christians were unbelieving Jews. That put them in a dark place, and Christ foretold their judgment in **Luke 19:41-44**,

“As he approached Jerusalem [to proclaim Himself as the rightful King and Prince of peace] and saw the city, he wept over it<sup>42</sup> and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you **peace** – but now it is hidden from your eyes.<sup>43</sup> The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side.<sup>44</sup> They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another [the Roman Armies did this in A.D 70], because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.’”

Christ is not the Prince of Peace for everyone. The Apostle Paul also makes this point in **Roman 2:9-10**,

“There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile;<sup>10</sup> but glory, honor and **peace** for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

Christ’s judgment upon unbelieving Israel in A.D. 70, using the armies of Rome, was the first great display of His power and authority over the wicked. He was officially given that authority when He ascended into heaven and sat down on His kingly throne [Daniel 7:14]. But did all Israel reject Christ? No. The New Covenant Church began at Jerusalem and was originally all Jewish in makeup. The believing Jews then shared the

good news with the Gentiles, who began pouring into Christ's kingdom. As a matter of fact, it wasn't long before the Gentile Christians outnumbered the Jewish Christians – and many of those Gentile Christians were tortured and put to death at Rome at the command of Emperor Nero. What did the ascended Lord Jesus do about Nero's persecution of Christians? Before the deadly persecution began, the Apostle Paul told the believers at Rome what would shortly follow their persecution. He reveals this in **Romans 16:20**, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Paul probably wrote that about A.D. 57. Around October of A.D. 65 – Nero began his slaughter of Christians, whom he blamed for a fire that wrecked havoc on the city of Rome in July of A.D. 65. And ironically in A.D. 66, unbelieving Israel revolted against the Roman Empire. You would think that Nero and Israel's common hatred toward Christianity would have brought them together. Not so. Israel revolted from Rome and Nero ordered the revolt to be crushed, but did not live to see it because he was judged for his wickedness by the ascended Lord Jesus and committed suicide in A.D. 68. Jerusalem fell at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70 – and thus the two greatest persecutors of Christianity, at that time, were crushed by the God of peace. Friends, God has given us a proven track record for doing what He says. Christ carried out that judgment against Nero and unbelieving Israel so that righteousness, truth and peace could continue to move forward upon this earth.

And so this morning, I can say without fear of contradiction that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. The peace He brings to His followers is – **peace**

**with God**, through faith in Christ – the **peace of God** [which is profound because God is always at peace with Himself. He never lives in fear] – and because God has made us His temples, we have the **God of peace** dwelling within us. Christians, we must own that peace and then spread that peace to our families, our communities and to all the nations. And yes, we will face opposition, but we must not be afraid of those who oppose us – because God has promised that as Abraham’s descendants through faith in Christ [Galatians 3:29] – we will possess the cities of our enemies and we will bless all the nations of the earth [Genesis 22:16-18].

Light overcomes darkness. Truth prevails against lies. Which is why **James 3:18** tells us that, “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” There is no true peace apart from righteousness, truth and justice. And if our opposition turns violent and deadly, our Prince of Peace, who is also Mighty God, will bring the fire of His judgment upon them. He does this so that the **increase of His government and peace** will never end. Let’s pray.