

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:1-7

17 And I will wait on Jehovah, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him. 18 Here am I and the children whom Jehovah has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel from Jehovah of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion. 19 And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. 21 They will pass through it hard pressed and hungry; and it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their God, and look upward. 22 Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness. "Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He lightly esteemed The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed her, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, In Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. 3 You have multiplied the nation And increased its joy; They rejoice before You According to the joy of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian. 5 For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire. 6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this."

"The Peace That Surpasses Understanding"

As we come to the final Sunday of Advent for this year I am launching my message from the same passage in Isaiah that Michael used last week picking up on another important theme in that passage: One that has actually been in and around all three of our Advent texts this year: Peace!

Not the kind of 'world peace' that wins beauty contest interviews...

- But the Peace that Jesus brought to our needy world.

Traditionally the themes of Advent are Hope, Love, Joy and Peace. They are focused on as the true gifts that Jesus brings in His first coming and fulfills in His Second Coming.

- So this morning I want to consider what this peace is all about and why it is so important in our lives.

The theme of today's message was inspired by a timeless editorial entitled The Prince of Peace by R.J. Rushdoony first published back in 1970. There he said in part:

"Violent marches for peace are a common fact today. Our cities are being attacked, public buildings bombed, and the police assaulted by our modern peace lovers. Such peace as these men have to offer is another word for slavery. The Bible makes clear that peace is not a matter of politics but of religion, more specifically, of Jesus Christ. Peace is a product of an inward character; it goes together with righteousness and truth. To illustrate: a hundred years ago, bank messengers carried heavy canvas bags of gold coins up and down Wall Street. When a bag broke, the crowd would form a circle around the area, until the messenger picked up every piece. A man bending over when a bag broke received a boot in the rear.

Today, it would not be safe, of course, to transport bags of gold coins that way. Moreover, if such a bag broke now, there would be a mass scramble to pick up the gold and run.

The difference is the loss of Christian faith and character. There is neither peace nor security in the world today, because there is neither peace nor righteousness in the lives of men.

Our Lord declared that a “good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit” (Matt. 7:17). A corrupt humanity is bringing forth corruption. We have no right to expect peace from it.”

Our text from Isaiah in context shows a people who have gone astray, which is certainly still our situation today, as it was back in 1970, and if we are to provide Good News for a needy world we need to understand the importance of returning to the Prince of Peace! In our text from Isaiah we learned that the government will be upon the shoulders of Jesus, in part as the prince of peace, and that of His government and peace there will be no end!

Now when we as Americans hear the words government and peace we almost immediately think of world events, national wars, even world wars and how men have strived to find peace in various ways. However, peace in this sense is nothing more than an absence of conflict and that is not what the prophet nor the angels have in mind! In fact, Jesus makes this perfectly clear when He speaks to His disciples with regard to going out into the world:

Matthew 10: “34 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; 36 and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’

➤ So is Jesus contradicting what Isaiah and the angels said about His bringing peace?

No, Jesus is pointing out that He does not bring a peace that is the absence of conflict as the world would define peace, but rather that those who truly find His peace will have that peace even in the midst of real conflicts... We can see this tension better than anywhere else when Jesus enters the Garden of Gethsemane before His suffering and death... This was the necessary work that had to be done to bring His Peace and Jesus was at peace even in the midst of much agony over the suffering that was approaching and disappointment with His own disciples as they could not pray with Him even one hour.

The writer of Hebrews gives us an important commentary about this portion of the life of Jesus:

Hebrews 12: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus had come to save His people from their sins and seeing this through to the end would bring great joy and thus He could be at peace in the midst of great agony and terrible circumstances.

➤ Jesus could do this because He was beloved of His Father & never doubted His right standing nor His calling.

And we are to follow His example as the author and finisher of our faith... The saving faith that gives us peace with God as explained so clearly by the Apostle Paul in the Book of Romans.

Romans 5: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

➤ Now we are all for this peace!

But remember that it is NOT some intellectual concept of ‘peace’ or feeling of ‘peace’ BUT real peace...

- **The peace that Isaiah and those angels were proclaiming!**
- **A peace that would come as a result of the work of Jesus and this peace would have no end!**

Sometimes we miss what precedes those verses in Romans 5, and we don't much care for what follows, but both are important.

- **Paul says THEREFORE having been justified by faith we have peace with God.**

So all that preceded chapter five is important! There Paul went to great lengths to show the need of man and the salvation we have in Jesus who came to save His people from their sins! Immediately before in chapter four Paul uses Abraham as our example of what saving faith is all about...

Romans 4: "13 For the promise that he would be the heir of the world ... is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all [both Jew & Gentile]

[Abraham] was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. 22 And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."

23 Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, 24 but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification."

Did Abraham have his ups and downs? We know that he did from our study of Genesis and yet we have him here as the example of a faithful man...

- **A man who was justified by faith in the same way that we are justified by faith & thus have peace with God.**

A peace that is true satisfaction and a peace that brings real contentment no matter what our circumstances in this life. This is why that great truth about having peace with God can be followed by this in Romans 5:

3 "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

This great truth is what the Apostle again has in mind when he writes to the Saints in Philippi these familiar and challenging words...

Philippians 4: "4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

- **So the bottom line is that the peace of God that will have no end and was proclaimed to all the world by the angels is the completed work of Jesus who came to save His people from their sins.**
- **It is good to remember in this Christmas season how we are to live in the reality of that peace.**

Again, it does NOT depend on our feelings, our perfect knowledge and certainly not our circumstances since we still live in a fallen world until Jesus returns.

- **It depends on our faithfulness just as we saw with Abraham and all those others Saints given for our examples in the great hall of faith in Hebrews eleven.**

In order to properly consider what this means for us and our times, we should think again about the coming of those angels on the first Christmas morning...

They came to the shepherds proclaiming, "I bring YOU tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people!"

- **The Good News comes to each of us as individuals and each of us must put our faith in the work of Jesus alone to be at peace with God.**

But it does not remain with us, but needs to bring joy and peace to all people or to the world. Seeing just how this works is very important as we face a presidential campaign that wants us to look to Washington DC for answers or Paris summits that want to tackle climate change to save the planet!

- **Neither of them will bring peace with God and we must be careful not to place our faith in them!**

However, this does NOT absolve us of any responsibility or interest in governments or the environment.

We know that Jesus is the Creator of all things and that the government is upon His shoulders and we are tasked with being good stewards of His creation and good stewards of justice and peace in the civil realm.

- **And yes it all comes down to being at peace with God!**
- **Peace with God is needed in ALL areas of our lives...**

If you are not at peace with God, you will not be at peace with yourself:

- **No matter how many yoga classes you take or psychiatrists that you visit.**

If you are not at peace with God you will not be a healthy member of whatever family you are a part of:

- **No matter how many retreats you take or books that you read!**

If you are not at peace with God you will not be a help to the local church but a hindrance, no matter how many volunteer activities you help with or Bible classes that you teach.

If you are not at peace with God you cannot understand God's plan to have the civil magistrate as the terror of evil-doers! You will either check out and ignore politics or get involved for all the wrong reasons. Whether one is a libertarian or a communist, without a regenerate people who are at peace with God, all you will have in the end is chaos or tyranny!

- **Now all this may sound a bit extreme or harsh, but I would submit that it is what we find with an honest reading of the Scriptures.**

Whether we turn to the lessons of the Law & Prophets, the parables and teachings of Jesus or the admonitions of Paul and the other Apostles. Being at peace with God is that foundation of rock that Jesus said some homes would be built on and it is the proper foundation for all the areas of life I just outlined. This is truly where the rubber meets the road in the Christian life and is the starting point for any and all practical applications we might consider...

As individuals, we all face temptations and challenges, those storms and winds that Jesus said would come...

- **Only if your Christian life is built on the solid rock will it stand.**

This is NOT looking for some sort of sinless perfection, but rather an honest repentance and turning to Jesus when we fail and seeking His wisdom so we can grow stronger day by day...

- **We can only do this when we accept and know that we are at peace with God!**

The same is true for our families, for our church and even for our city, state and nation. Linda and I have enjoyed almost 41 years of marriage, and the joy continues to grow each year not because we have attained perfection or have lots of material blessings, but because we have kept Jesus as the foundation: Linda has not failed me often, but there have been times and of course my failures are legion,

but we can deal with them because we understand that the work of Jesus has brought peace with God to each of us and thus we can both stay close to God and close to each other!

- **If we take our eyes off God and look for peace and support from other family members, including our loving spouses, we WILL be disappointed in time.**

The same is true in the Church: Many have been devastated in recent years by failures of men who were in leadership positions... We should be disappointed and saddened when such things happen, but if it rocks our faith then it means we had our eyes in the wrong place! I have also seen this far too often in the political world where people put their faith in politicians or programs that are not Christ centered which are doomed to failure...

- **And even Christian politicians who we look up to can also fail in this fallen world.**

Again it should NOT be unexpected and should not shake our foundation...

- **IF we have the right one!**

Yes, we are to love and respect and submit to in various ways those who God has placed in authority over us, but our eyes must always stay on Jesus Who alone provides our peace with God.

- **Yes, it all really does come down to remembering that Jesus is the reason for the season!**
- **Or perhaps remembering as Pastor Wilson reminds us, ‘that sin is the reason for the season.’**
- **Jesus came to bring peace with God and we are to live in the reality of that peace.**

Even as the Prophet Isaiah prepared to give that promise of a Son that we all love and sing about this time of year, he reminded us about the two foundations of sand and rock that Jesus would later clarify...

Listen again to our text as we see those who refuse to seek God looking for answers somewhere else and those who turn to God in patient faith in order to know His peace:

19 “And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. 21 They will pass through it hard pressed and hungry; and it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their God, and look upward. 22 Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness. [remember Ecclesiastes!] “Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He lightly esteemed The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed her, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, In Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. 3 You have multiplied the nation And increased its joy; They rejoice before You According to the joy of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian. 5 For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire. 6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Communion Meditation: Genesis 14

“18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. 19 And he blessed him and said: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.””