

ISAIAH 9:1-7, Part 11 12-11-16

THE PRINCE OF PEACE

We will be there in a minute, but I begin with some thoughts to brighten your holidays. Actually, they are questions, riddles of a sort, hopefully to stimulate your thinking. Here you go. “Why is Christmas just like a day at the office?” The answer is – you do all the work and the fat guy with the suit gets all the credit. Ha Ha Ha. Next Christmas riddle - How come you never hear anything about the 10th reindeer "Olive"? Olive? Yeah, you know, from the Rudolph story - "Olive the other reindeer, used to laugh and call him names. “Ho, Ho, Ho.” Finally, “Why was Santa's little helper depressed?” Because he had low elf esteem. And we thank you for not throwing anything. By now, your brain is ready to tackle a passage from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, the prophet who so powerfully preached the good news of Jesus six hundred years before the big star appeared over Bethlehem. **1-7** *But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. 3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; they will be glad in Your presence as with the gladness of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. 5 For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, and cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire. 6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.*

Isaiah gives us the promise of a Kingdom and a King. This is one of those passages quoted so often at Christmas time, for it speaks of the promised child. Many themes have become prominent in our celebration of Christmas. The theme of giving would be one. Another idea associated with Christmas is that of peace. Our hymns speak of peace; our Christmas cards speak of peace. Commercials like to feature peaceful scenes. And, of course, there are the relevant Scriptures which are quoted. Most notably Luke 2:**14** *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.* And also the verse before us which called the coming King, the Prince of

Peace, for **7a** *There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace.* So, this is a Biblical thing, a good thing to think of at Christmas time. It is good, when you think of Jesus to think of peace. For He is the Prince of Peace who has come to bring peace. Micah 5:**2-5a,5a** *But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." 3 Therefore He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel. 4 And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. 5 This One will be our peace.* The Promised One, the coming One, the One who is from eternity but is also from Bethlehem of Judah. He is what? He is our peace, the Prince of Peace.

In our hymns we sing, "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus." "O Come, O Come Emmanuel, O Come Desire of Nations." Why did men want him to come? Because He is peace and oh we long for peace. This was the great longing God put in the heart of the Jews. They express it when they part by saying, "Shalom" - Peace. The great benediction or blessing God taught the priests was Numbers 6:**26** *The LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.* Peace is what we want. Everyone is pro-Peace, but how much peace is there?

There are really three levels of peace that humans can experience. They are related but they are certainly distinct, although the word *peace* may refer to any of them. These three are: peace with God, peace with self, peace with others. The first is peace with God. It is most important because without this the other types of peace are unattainable and because, really, our lack of peace with God is the foundational problem of human existence. Ever since Adam was evicted from the garden we have had awful problems, problems which stem from our discord with our Creator. If you think something is fundamentally fouled up with our world you are right. We were created to live in love with God, but because of sin we are naturally estranged from God. This is what the Bible teaches. It calls us enemies of God, strangers to God. Isaiah 59:**2** *But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.* Now there are many who won't tell you this. They will say, "We're all children of God. We all have a loving father, sort of a Santa Claus in the clouds." Ephesians 2:3 does say we are all children, but what kind? Children of wrath. The New Testament urges sinners to be reconciled to God. Much of modern religion sees no need for reconciliation. To these sentimental blind men there is no need for peace with God. God is our buddy. Repeatedly the prophets condemn such sweet talking deceivers

by saying as Jeremiah. 6:**14** *They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' But there is no peace.* Ezekiel says these are they who whitewash a rotting wall. They care only for symptoms and fail to attack the cancer that eats away at the bone. We have a need! We need to be made right with God.!

So, how will we do it? Simple, here's the formula. You better not shout, you better not pout, you better not cry I'm telling you why. God's making his list and checking it twice to see if you've been naughty or nice. And if you're nice you're at peace with God. Is that the answer? Please say, "No." I hope you know better. But I heard a preacher on radio ask a man, "Have you made your peace with God?" This is a popular religious concept. You can just imagine the army chaplain or the priest walking thru the hospital asking, "Son, have you made your peace with God?" That question rightly perceives the need but misses the method. **We** don't make peace with God at all. He, this One, the Son who is born, is our peace. **We cannot** make peace with God. Solemn vows won't do it; pious deeds won't do it. Sacred ritual can't do it. **He** is our peace. Understand this at Christmas please. Look at this precious word in Romans 5:**1** *Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* How do we have peace with God? Thru our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. That debt of sin which separated us from God, He paid in full on Calvary's cross **10,11** *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.* He says, "We exult in God." Christmas is celebration - but why? What are we celebrating? Peace with God which comes thru Jesus Christ, the peace Child, who is given by the Father to sinners like you and like me. So, let us be glad. Here is our Peace. *Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. For unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given and His name is called "The Prince of Peace."*

Now, there is a second type of peace. We speak often of it. It is an inner peace, a tranquility, a calm within a person, really a peace with self. This is something most of us value greatly but few actually have. Ours is a world full of tension and upset and anxiety and guilt. People often feel an inward churning that is the emotional equivalent of a hurricane. Efforts are made to stop it, but it isn't so easy. I think of the story from Operation Desert Storm back in 1991. It came from an attack helicopter squadron. On the first night of the operation, when we were engaged in shock and awe, the commander of the unit burst in to their sleeping quarters at 2 a.m. announcing, "The War has begun! The Navy is launching tomahawk missiles. Get your chemical suits and protective masks

and try to get some sleep.” Right! Peace understandably evades us in certain circumstances. So, in a frantic attempt to gain peace men drink alcohol, take drugs, go to doctors and gurus. They try to relax, forget - something to ease the inner pain. But it is clear enough that our world has not discovered anything that will do the trick.

Many have no peace within and why is that? The Bible says it is because we have no peace with God. The two are related. Now, there are lots of people, maybe you, who sense a personal need for inner peace, but you've never sensed a personal need for peace with God. But your peace with self, or the lack of it, is a symptom of your relationship with God. You may be concerned to eliminate the symptoms but you've got to attack the disease itself. So here again we find that Christ is essential and that Christ is our peace. You can try all the self-help methods you like: positive thinking, self-hypnosis, *serenity now* - what are you doing? You are saying to yourself, "Peace, Peace" when there is no peace. God says there is no peace for the wicked. As long as you've got a personal sin problem you will have a personal peace problem. The psychologist Carl Jung said, "*No one can live in peace in a house he knows is shortly to tumble about his ears.*" So, the one who gives you peace with God also gives you peace with self. He is our peace. He is Prince of Peace. John 14:27 "*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.*" Isn't that great?! He's not talking here about a peace with God or peace among men. He here says He gives inner peace. 27ab *Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you* It opposes anxiety; it opposes fear. It is what Paul calls the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension. It is not a worldly peace. Augustine says that peace to an unbeliever is the harmonious repose of the appetites. It's a temporary peace, dependent on the weather and the circumstances of life. Christ gives a richer peace, a deeper peace. It is the peace of sins forgiven, of a Savior on the throne, of eternal life promised and assured.

Now, for some of you, these things are not realities. You have no peace with God for you are still in your sins. You have never trusted in Jesus Christ. You should **not** have peace. You have every reason to fret and worry and fear. St. Augustine is famous for saying that God has made us for Himself and we shall be forever restless until we find our rest in Him. I hear of the great preacher of a generation past, Donald Grey Barnhouse, that he used to give an unusual benediction at the end of worship services. He would call down God's peace on those who love Christ and then say, "*And if you do not, may the Lord visit you with restlessness until you find your rest in Him.*" For you who know not Christ and His peace that is my prayer for you. That your conscience would be troubled and pained until you bow the knee before the Lord of glory and rest indeed in Him.

Now to you who are believers God says Colossians 3:**15** *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts*. Everyday let it be so. Don't let the values of the world rule your thoughts. Don't let the cares of life distract you. **15a** *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts*. He is our Peace. Peace rules the day when Christ rules the mind. And our hearts and minds are to be His throne. He is the Mighty King and the Prince of Peace.

Our third type of peace to examine is peace among men or peace with others. This peace is one of the great dreams of humanity. It is the quest of noble men and has led to great movements, organizations and even wars. Seems like every two years we have the Arab/Israeli peace talks. There is the UN and NATO. No doubt, peace is something sought by man but it is a search which, in large part, has failed. Some thought the evolution of man would lead to peace or the education of man would lead to peace. Nonsense. The foolishness of that idea was highlighted by Neville Chamberlain who boldly told the world, "*We have achieved peace in our time*" at the same moment that Hitler's blitzkrieg of Poland was beginning. Peace of this sort is no easy commodity to come by. That's why when men hear in the Christmas story those angelic words, *Peace on earth, good will toward men*, they take notice. If this child is going to give peace among men - hey, that's alright. That's important. You might not care about peace with God, but peace among men - you like that idea. We need peace between nations, yes, and peace between races and between neighbors and husbands and wives and parents and children and management and labor.

Does Jesus give us all that? Yes and No. I say, "No" because it's obvious that Jesus Himself has become an element of division for many. That's obvious from a study of world history, especially church history, but all you have to do to confirm that is speak to some folks around you here. Many of you have conflict at work, conflict in your family because of Jesus. Should that surprise us? No. Matthew 10:**34** *Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*. The children of light and the children of darkness have never and will never get along. But Jesus did not come to give peace between light and dark, sin and holiness. Newer translations of Luke 2:**14b** say, *on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased*. The peace Christ gives is not of all men, but between his followers. The Prince of Peace grants his gift of peace to those in his kingdom, and them only.

This doesn't mean we aren't to seek peace with those who lack our faith. We certainly are. Romans 12:**18** *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*. Now it takes two to be at peace, but **18** *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*. But especially the concern of God and the work of Jesus is to give peace to His people, to those who love Him.

Micah said of Jesus, "*This one is our peace.*" Honestly friend, if you and I agree on Jesus and we both love Him it doesn't matter if you are a Democrat and I'm a Republican, or you are black and I am white or you like Coke and I like Pepsi. We are gonna have peace. When Christ is the glue you have peace between Israelis and Arabs, Iraqis and Americans, Germans and Jews. We are **one** in Jesus. Ephesians 2:14 *For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near.* Chuck Colson who worked on staff for President Nixon tells of how when he became a Christian he got into a small group of Christian congressmen who politically were his enemies but loved him with a love he'd never seen before. Colson saw peace among men. When he went to prison, from charges related to Watergate he found the same thing in that place. Christ is the glue. When Jesus walked the earth He had 12 primary disciples - one was named Simon the Zealot. Zealots hated Rome and sought to overthrow its oppression. Another disciple was named Levi or Matthew - he was a tax-collector for Rome, a Jew who sold out to their oppressors. To a Jew, the lowest of men. No two men would have hated each other more than Simon and Levi. But in Christ they were one.

Now, folks I have to tell you. When we come together from diverse places and ways and call each other *brother* and *sister* and we forgive and we care, those who see it will realize this is fantastic, it's supernatural. They will ask, "How do you do it?" What shall we then say? We say, "We have a leader. We are one because of Him. He is our Peace. He is our rallying point. His name is the Prince of Peace, Jesus our Lord." Tell the world! Tell them that in Christ there is peace with God, with self, with others! And Brethren, let's show that its so. Ephesians 4:3 *Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* Will you spread peace this Christmas? Will you build up the kingdom of God this Christmas? Where Christ's kingdom is there is peace. If the Christmas story is real. If Christ is true, then peace will rule in our hearts and in our church. You know, that first Christmas there was a bright star that led men to Jesus. Today we must be that star. as we exhibit inward peace and as we exhibit peace with each other, men will come from afar to seek the holy One whom we worship. And in seeking the Prince of Peace they will also find a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

So this title, *Prince of Peace*, lays before us a challenge doesn't it? It also gives us great hope. Let's finish today where we began Isaiah.9:6,7a *For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of*

His government or of peace Praise God that this is so. You want peace? More peace? Social peace? Hey, it's coming. The promise of eternity, the promise of the everlasting kingdom is a promise of peace. Isaiah promises that our Savior will rule forever. And look at how his kingdom is pictured Isaiah 11:**6-9** *The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. 7 Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den 9 they will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.* What do you have when the wolf lies down with the lamb? Someone said you have a very nervous lamb. No, you have peace, pure beautiful peace. When the son of David, the Messiah King, the Prince of Peace is on His throne.

So, when you wish another "peace" this Christmas you can do so with real hope, you can do it with full understanding of what that peace is and you can do so and should do so with a heart full of praise to Him who is our Peace. Join with Wesley and let's sing, "Hail the Heaven born Prince of Peace." But first, let's go the Lord of Peace in prayer