

Advent Peace

Intro – On this second Sunday of Advent, we light the Peace Candle. It is to remind us that peace is possible and will be achieved in the Second Advent. This second candle is also called the “Bethlehem Candle.” Peace is a theme throughout the Bible. In the O.T. we see the word shalom, which can mean so many things: peace, prosperity, welfare, deliverance or salvation. But ultimately, when the Jews thought of shalom in reference to God, it was in an eschatological perspective. They longed for the peace that the Messiah would bring as promised by the prophets.

In the N.T. the Greek word *eirene* the word we get irenic from also has some of the Jewish meanings, but we see more about peace with God and peace of God through Christ.

World Peace – Ez 7:25 – Whenever we think about peace we normally and naturally think about an absence of hostilities; that there is no armed conflict between nations or peoples. We remember back to the 60’s and the hippies that flashed peace signs at everyone, or we remember John and Yoko staying in bed for two weeks for peace, or the song by these two “*All We Are Saying, is Give Peace a chance.*” Here’s another quote from John Lennon “*If everyone demanded peace instead of another television set, then there'd be peace.*”

The idea of peace in the world is exclusively man-centered. When UNESCO was first chartered in 1946, the Preamble to their charter read “*Since wars begin in the minds of men. It is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.*” Just like John Lennon, WE can make peace happen.

Last week we spoke about the corruption of all creation and of man’s nature. Part of that is his inability not to sin; not to break the half of the commandments when it comes to national relations. Nations first think themselves a god as do some of their leaders; they make idols for themselves in treasure, they covet, they steal, they murder... So given the fact that man cannot live in peace, world peace is impossible. Ezekiel 7:25 **When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there shall be none.** And why will there be none? Jeremiah 25:37 **and the peaceful folds are devastated because of the fierce anger of the LORD.**

The Holy God of the universe cannot abide any sin, and since man is a sinful creature, there is nothing but God’s anger in his actions. That is why there cannot be peace in the world until that time when Jesus returns. God’s common grace, that grace that He gives to all mankind, limits the amount of strife in the world; it limits man’s ability to be as depraved as he could be.

Jesus in Mt 24 speaks about the end times when what we are seeing now in the way of world strife will increase significantly. Jesus says Matthew 24:6–7 **And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.** In other words, it’s going to get a whole lot worse! So, you see, there can never really be peace in the world as long as there is sin, and there will be sin until the return of Jesus.

Peace With God – So the problem is that because sin has entered the world, we are enemies of God, and it is only by His mercy and grace that we exist at all. Paul writes that man, who focused on the flesh, in other words himself, is hostile to God. James says that friendship with the world is enmity with God.

How can we then, become friends with and at peace with a righteous God? WE can't do anything. Our nature will not permit it. The sinfulness of our hearts is in direct opposition to a holy God. So, there is nothing that we can do to propose terms of peace. We can't go into the holy courtroom and lay out our terms of peaceful coexistence. We can't demand a ceasefire, nor can we make any demands. And for sure we can't demand that God surrenders.

So how can we have peace with God? There is only one WAY. In spite of what others may say there is only one way to have peace with God, and that is through the Prince of Peace; Jesus. Romans 5:1 **Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** We must be justified, in other words made right with God, and this is only done through faith. Our being at peace with God is all God's doing. Remember last week we looked at the promises of God in the Golden Chain of Romans 8. That God had predestined, called and then justified those whom He called. God does all the work of reconciliation because if it were left to us and our nature, we would not seek Him out. Our justification by faith itself is a gift of God since faith is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God gives us the faith after He regenerates our hearts. He makes it possible for us to believe.

So how does He do this. Paul writes in Eph 2:13-18. We are brought near; we are brought into a peaceful relationship with God through the Blood of Jesus. See what Paul says, Jesus has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. That dividing wall, the curtain in the Temple has been rendered apart that now as friends of God we have access to His throne. In Colossians he writes that Jesus made peace by the blood of the cross. Again, it was the work of the Triune God in making peace. The Father called us, the Holy Spirit regenerates our hearts and the Son died as a propitiatory sacrifice.

Inheritance – One of the benefits of being at peace with God, is that He has adopted us as His children, and therefore are eligible to inherit the kingdom. Psalm 37:11 **But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.** Jesus echoes this on the Sermon on the Mount. But, you notice that the MEEK will inherit the land and have abundant peace. This is impossible for the world because of the pride of man. Pride got us into this mess that we are in, and the prideful heart is what will prevent peace in this world. It is only because we have been changed and our heart is no longer hardened by pride and sin that we will inherit the Kingdom with Christ. We willingly submit to the King of Kings. Pride has been taken from our nature and we become slaves of righteousness rather than prideful slaves of sin. Because that pride is gone (at least somewhat) God, through justification and adoption, allows us to be inheritors of His Kingdom.

Quietness and Trust – The other benefit is that there will be a quietness and trust. Isaiah 32:17–18 **And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.** Notice what Isaiah is saying? The peace, quietness and trust are the effect and result of righteousness. Again, this is God's doing through Jesus. It is HIS righteousness that we have and none of our own. He imputed His righteousness on us as we imputed our sin on Him.

Because we have been called, justified and adopted, we are at peace with God. But what does that mean? We still experience all manner of trials and troubles. That doesn't sound very peaceful to me. Here's the rub: just because we have been justified and adopted, sin still creeps into our lives and actions, and there is a cost to those sins. We still live in a sin-filled world and experience the sins of others against us; we still disobey God and He, as any good father will chastise us for those transgressions. But the peace with God will be fully realized when we come into glory. When we are in

the presence of God, freed from all sin or possibility of sin, accepting our inheritance as sons and daughters, full peace will be realized.

Peace of God – We talked about the peace with God, now let's look at the peace of God. Philippians 4:6–7 **do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** Have you ever talked with a believer that is going through some tough times and they are as calm as if there was nothing wrong? That is the peace of God. Paul tells us to be anxious about nothing. I think this is true of all believers that God is in control; He knows what He is doing, and all things will work out in the end. But Paul tells us how to get this peace and how to not be anxious; PRAYER!! I believe that is what got Paul through all the issues he faced, and how all the martyrs and missionaries, and everyday people get through life when things are going south. An example of this is when Paul and Silas were put in prison in Acts 16. Acts 16:25 **About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.** They were just beaten with rods, their feet were in stocks, and here they are praying and singing to God. That is the peace that surpasses all understanding. The world wouldn't get this. They would see this as a terrible thing and be worried and depressed, but here Paul and Silas were praying and singing!

When things go REALLY bad what is your first reaction? Is it reacting, or is it prayer? We can look to David and the tough times he was in; Saul hunting him down, his son overthrowing him as king, men conspiring against him, but what does he do? He writes songs. We know them as Psalms, but David was lifting his voice to God with all the faith and confidence in him to get him out of the problem. **Read Psalm 54.**

This peace comes only through faith. One commentator wrote: "Christians experience peace when they trust in Christ and grow in their faith. This is what Paul prays for when he asks that "the God of hope might fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Rom 15:13). Paul further promises that when believers cast their cares on God through prayer, "the peace of God surpassing understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus""

This is what we have. Gautama Buddha, founding figure of Buddhism wrote "Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without." Here peace is man-centered, and we can do it all by ourselves. When we come to realize that we can do nothing apart from God, we realize that even peace is from Him. The peace that we have that surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts. Dante wrote in his Divine Comedy. "His will is our peace."

Conclusion – there can be only one way for peace. There is only one Author of peace, one giver of peace and one sustainer of peace. He is the Prince of Peace who we will celebrate the birth of in a couple of weeks, but now we wait. We wait for His second coming when all things will be made new, and the peace that surpasses understanding will be fully realized.

Our peace is realized through Christ and promised in God's Word. Psalm 119:165 **Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.**