

### ***“He Will Be Called—Prince of Peace”***

I learned this week that, to the Piro tribal people of Peru, **the word “peace,” means, “the well-arranged soul.”** To the Zacapoaxtla of Mexico, peace means, **“completeness.”** To the Gbeapo people of Liberia, it means, **“my heart sits down.”** And to the Baouli people of Ivory Coast, it means **“a song in my body.”** Those are great word-pictures of peace, aren't they? And for some of us, this year, like no other year, is a year in which we need peace.

There are a number of families in our church who have loved ones who are dying, people who are battling significant health issues, that's difficult when it's you, and can be even more difficult when it's someone you love.

Some of you may be having your first Christmas with the empty chair. There will be a chair around the table this Christmas where someone you love sat last year, but they won't be there this year—because of a death, or divorce, or just family schedules couldn't get coordinated this year. Whatever reason there's an empty chair and it just wrecks you because you want to have all your family together.

For lots of people there's an anxious feeling, and unsettled feeling, not much peaceful feeling, all the things to-do, all the places to be, all the stuff to pack. I've got to admit I have an unsettled feeling about Christmas this year because our house was broken into about this time last year. There's a never ending supply of tension, anxiety, pressure to go, go, go, mixed with some of the financial tension of our times. Rather than living with sense of constant peace, it seems like most people I know are full of anxiety, tension, and pressure!

Isaiah 9:6 is a prophetic verse that points to Jesus Christ. It was written 700 years before Jesus' birth, and it refers to the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Messiah who would come some day. It says **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, NIV).**

I hope that today, you and I can find a way to actually experience the peace that this Prince brings. I hope by understanding this we can experience it as an integral part of our lives. But it begs question, if Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and you've chosen to follow him, then why don't we experience that peace in more real ways in our lives?

The prophet Isaiah calls Jesus the Prince of Peace. When Jesus is born the angel says to the shepherds that Jesus will bring peace to all people. But when I think of births, peace doesn't come to mind. I've been present at a birth, not very peaceful! A woman giving birth in a barn, less peaceful! But back up even further. Mary's a teenager and she's told by an angel that she's going to give birth to the Messiah. She's engaged to married, she's a virgin, Joseph doesn't believe her at first, her parents had to doubt her—not much peace there. For 9 months she's carrying the Son of God. For 9 months she's been the object of gossip, ridicule, presumption. Then she and Joseph have to travel 90 miles on a donkey to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem to take part in a census. Riding on a donkey, 9 months pregnant! No peace there.

They get into town, they're the last one's there, Joseph is knocking on doors, no rooms, they're all full. Joseph negotiates a place in a guy's stable, which was probably a shallow cave. The stable has animals and animal stuff in it and Mary gives birth.

Think about this: no epidural, no midwife, no running water. She's screaming, Joseph delivers, baby arrives--the Prince of Peace is born. We're told in Matthew that Jesus' birth was so threatening to the status quo, to king Herod, that he had all the baby boys in Bethlehem killed. Jesus and his family barely escaped. They flee to Egypt—they're fugitives. That's not peaceful. For the first part of Jesus' life, his family is on the run in order to protect the life of Jesus. The murder of all those baby boys, Jesus' family on the run, the whole scene, where's the peace?

I look at the world today, I look at Christian marriages, they should be at peace, right? And yet just as many end up in divorce as stay together. I look at the financial tension we have in the most affluent, the most blessed, country in the world. People make more on average than any time in history, but they are less happy and content. Less peace.

I watch the news and I see car bombings, and wars, and murders right here in Joplin. I'm a why guy. If Jesus is the Prince of Peace, why isn't their more peace?! Did Jesus fail? Did he fail? Ultimately it depends on how you define peace.

**"Prince of Peace," as Isaiah wrote it, in his native language of Hebrew is "sar-shalom."** Jesus is the sar-shalom.

"Sar" is the word for prince. Normally when we think of a prince, we think of the son of a king. But that's not what this word is designed to make us think. This word literally means, captain, governor, chief, general. The one in charge. The go-to guy.

The Romans had a very similar word for their ruler, he was called the "C-sar." They had Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, Nero Caesar. That was their head guy. Until the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russians adopted the same title for their head of state. They called their ruler the, "czar."

Jesus is the sar-shalom. Shalom is the word for peace. In the Hebrew language, "peace" is a rich and powerful concept. Shalom means rest, well-being, wholeness, tranquility, contentment, peace.

Jesus is the Captain of Rest, the General of Tranquility, the Chief of Wholeness, the Lord, of Contentment. The sar-shalom. All that points to an inner peace. In fact, the last time Jesus gave a formal talk, here's what he said. **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me...Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:1 and 27, NIV).**

What he's saying here is that he gives a kind of peace that is different than you can get in the world. He's talking about inner peace. Peace in your soul. Peace that comes from a sense of having God's presence with you, and forgiveness for your sins, and hope, and purpose. Not the world's kind of peace, inner peace.

Last week I got that call that a man I know pretty well, a man from church, was in the hospital. His cancer had progressed to a point where he was in intense pain. He'd become dehydrated and weak and so they admitted him. It wasn't but a couple of years ago that his son had come and talked to me, worried about his dad's soul, that he was far from God. Over the course of the last 2 years his dad has brought out his questions about the faith, we've talked about them, he's wrestled with stuff, and in the process he came to believe that Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God, the Savior. Then he made it personal this past summer when he was baptized in Shoal Creek. I got to baptize him myself.

I visited him in the hospital on Monday and he told me that he's faced this cancer with a completely different attitude because of his connection to Christ. He has a peace. He knew that his body would probably not be able to fight this off, but he told me several times, "Either way I win, either way, God wins, either way, it's all good." He died on Wednesday. His family is grieving; I'm grieving. But inwardly, for all of them, there is peace. Because he has welcomed the Prince of Peace, the sar-shalom, into his life and it changed him radically. He saw life differently. That's real peace.

This kind of peace isn't a tingling good feeling. It's a wholeness, a sense of a much bigger picture, it is the presence of Christ himself. It's important to know that peace is not the absence of stress, or the absence of turmoil. Real peace is not the absence of anything, it is the presence of Christ. With his presence comes peace, without his presence, no peace. I've seen it put this way somewhere: **No Christ, no peace. Know Christ, know peace.**

We can use the language of inviting Christ into our lives to experience his peace, and we can also use the language of standing under Jesus as Lord. I like this imagery because I can invite Jesus into my life and experience salvation, but if I don't stand under him as Lord, I'm going to have problems—I'm not going to have peace. Christians do this all the time and it tears their lives up. They say, "I've got Christ in my heart, but I'm still going have sex outside of marriage." You cannot expect peace in that situation because even though Jesus is alive and within you, you've stepped outside his Lordship. Some say, "I've got Jesus in my heart, but I'm going to live beyond my means and rack up my credit cards and buy stuff I don't need, forget about tithing." Yes, you're still a Christian; yes Jesus is alive in you, but you can't experience much peace. You're going to have the consequences of stepping out from under the sar-shalom.

So if we are under the sar-shalom, under the Lordship of Christ, we can experience his peace. There are a couple things that that means for us. First, **sar-shalom is the peace who comforts you.** Maybe you've got a lot of internal anxiety, or some external situations that are messing with your life. You don't feel the peace. What do you do about that. Here's some good advice from the Apostle Paul. **"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7, NIV).**

You want peace, what does this tell you? Turn worry into prayer. Instead of sitting around worrying about something, put that same energy into talking to, and listening to the God who made you. And what can you take to God in prayer? It says it right there: everything! Sometimes people tell me, "I can pray for other people but I just can't pray for myself." My response is, "You better start praying for yourself!" You need it! I need it! Two of the most powerful words in the English language are, "I need..." Pray for yourself, for others, take everything to God. That's how we stand under the sar-shalom and experience lasting inner peace. Sometimes you don't know how good God is until you know just how painful life can be and then you step under his covering and you experience his sar-shalom.

That passage tells us that peace is linked to thanksgiving. This is just a fact. If you're down, and depressed, force yourself to see what is good in your life, because it's there! See the blessings and give thanks in the midst of the tough stuff, in the midst of the lean times, focus on what you do have, not on what you don't!

This is telling us that through prayer, through our ongoing connecting to God, to Jesus, we experience a peace that goes beyond our understanding. That doesn't mean that it's a big mystery, it means that it's not of our own doing. It's a peace that comes to us from God, not our own skill, or by our own efforts.

And then, watch this, the peace will guard your hearts and minds. I love this! This peace that the sar-shalom, the Prince of Peace gives, **stands guard** over your heart and mind. The imagery here is fantastic. This peace that's given to us isn't just a feeling, or something to experience. It's an active force. It's a guard, a sentinel, protecting your heart and mind.

You stand under Christ and his presence, his peace will guard your heart and mind. What does that mean? It will guard you against making stupid mistakes, this peace will guard you against stuff other people will do to undermine you. This peace will guard you against pettiness, it will guard your heart and mind against giving them to the wrong things, the wrong activities, the wrong people. This is an active presence, this peace. It's not just a concept it's standing guard!

One other thought on Jesus being the Prince of Peace, the sar-shalom is that **He is the peace who saves you.** He is the peace who brings salvation. Romans 5:1 says, **"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Romans 5:1, NIV).**

We don't have peace by our own religious efforts or by just avoiding sinful things. We have peace with God through Jesus. Now, I have to point out that there are also times when God will strategically disturb your peace in order to help you or me make a course correction. Here's a silly example. 6 or 8 months ago, I'm getting my hair cut, I go to Salon Blonde, the owner, Shari has been cutting my hair for 10 years now. She tells me, "Oh, Aaron, do you want to be a guinea pig and get a free gift." She had me at "free gift." The deal was that I had to use a hair product for a week and the fill out a form and send it in. So I did. It was a big tube of stuff, I used it for a week. It was a kind of gel, and it really was good. I filled out the questionnaire to send it in because I wanted my free gift and at the very end of the questionnaire it said, "I agree to dispose of any unused product." I was supposed to check the box, sign it and send it in.

What am I thinking at that point? I'm thinking, I can check the box saying that I disposed of the unused product and keep it anyway. Nobody will know. I'm thinking, or, I can throw it away into the trash can, "dispose of it," and then pull it out later. I didn't say I wouldn't retrieve it after I disposed of it! Suddenly I feel God disturbing my peace. Am I a man of truth in the little things as well as the big things? Am I? It felt wasteful to me, but truthful. I threw it away and did not go back for it.

That's little stuff, but the sar-shalom might disturb your peace if you are about to fudge on your taxes. He might disturb your peace if you're about to have sex outside of marriage. He might disturb your peace if you are failing to be mindful of the poor, the broken-hearted, the down trodden.

The Lord of Peace, the Captian of Rest, the General of Tranquility has the right to disturb all of that in order to get your attention, to help you make a course correction, to help you and me see that we need to get back under his Lordship, to be right with God.

Take a look at another scripture. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace...” (Ephesians 2:13-14a, NIV)**

Why is the Christmas story so important? For God so loved the world that he sent his Son, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Why is Christmas so important? Because we're bent toward sin. You don't ever have to have sin lessons! Selfishness, greed and all the evil that comes from that, it comes pretty naturally. We're bent toward that. Jesus' name literally means, “God saves.” Saves from what? Our tendency to sin. He lived a sinless life so he could then give his life as a sacrifice for us. He would die on a cross to bring us peace with God. He is the sar-shalom. The Prince of Peace. **No Christ, no peace. Know Christ, know peace.**

My last thought on Jesus as Prince of Peace would be his call on our lives that we would be peace-makers. And by this I mean in our daily lives that we, because we are under the sar-shalom, would be bearers of peace, always. Scripture gives this command, **“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14, TNIV).**

What does that look like? It means that you move toward people to make peace when there is a conflict. That coworker that you're mad at because of something he or she said, you move toward them to bring peace. It means those family members who grate on your nerves, who know just how to push your buttons, you don't feed that fire, you decide to be a peacemaker. Those situations where you can get drawn into gossip and tear someone down, you deliberately choose not to, because you are under the Prince of Peace, and you will be a peacemaker yourself. Jesus himself said, **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9, TNIV).** If we stand under the Prince of Peace, we are choosing to be peacemakers.

Now, let's finish this series where we started, with the words of the prophet Isiah: **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, NIV).** Captain of Rest, General of Tranquility, Chief of Wholeness, Lord of Contentment. That's the Jesus of Christmas. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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