Prince of Peace

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Date: 23 December 2018

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[0:00] Good morning again. So we're in our last of our series we've been doing this month, looking at the names in Isaiah 9 that are given to the Messiah.

So I think I may have mentioned this stat in a sermon before, so you'll forgive me, because it is an astounding statistic. So I'll mention it again. And that is that in just over the last 100 years, so basically since the beginning of World War I, there have been recorded no more than 26 days in that 100 years or more where there hasn't been a war somewhere in the world.
26 days in 100 years of relative peace. And that's just the definition of war where over 1,000 people, an armed conflict where over 1,000 people are killed.
And there's of course much smaller conflicts on smaller scales. But that recorded, official, 26 days in 100 years. It's astounding, isn't it? Which means that as the human race, we are still as far away from learning the secret of peace as we ever were.
We are no better than those savage tribes of long ago. We're still no closer to learning peace than they were.
[1:15] Sure, we've learned a lot of other things over the centuries. We've learned how to fly. We've sent a man to the moon. We've come up with computers that fit in our pockets. And yet we haven't figured out how to do peace yet.

It's the one thing that eludes us. And I'm not just talking about peace out there, you know, political peace. But I'm also talking about peace in here, peace in our personal lives and our personal situations.
How many days have there been in your life where you haven't been in some kind of conflict or felt some kind of hostility towards another human being? At work or at church or at the home or on the road?
See, truth is, the lack of peace out there in international politics is rooted, really, in a lack of peace in here. In our hearts and in our own personal relationships. That's where it all starts.
And that is also why the last of these four names given to the Messiah in Isaiah 9 should really grab our attention. Because this king that God was promising to send into the world through the prophet Isaiah, who later, of course, turns out to be Jesus Christ himself, along with all the other names that he's given in this passage to help us understand just who he is and the nature of his rule, he is also given this final name, the Prince of Peace.
[2:36] And it's very important we understand why Jesus is called the Prince of Peace this morning. So let's have a look firstly at the first word, Prince. And that doesn't just refer to a pop singer.

The original word in the Hebrew, which the Old Testament is written in, actually means more than just a child of a king or a queen, a child of royalty. It also refers to a leader of people, someone qualified to command, especially it was used of military commanders.
The same Hebrew word was used, for example, of the Assyrian military commander who besieged Jerusalem, even though he wasn't a child of royalty. So it's used in both of those senses, a military commander as well as a child of royalty.
And typically, in the ancient world, those two things were the same. Ancient princes were raised to command armies right from the word go. They didn't just attend tea parties and balls.
They learned how to fight. They learned swordcraft and the art of war. A prince's job was to defend and expand his father's territory.
[3:42] And so the Messiah is foreseen by Isaiah to be a prince, a commander of troops who's going to come to earth to defend and expand his father's kingdom.

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But then he arrives and is born surrounded by animals to a couple of refugees or later to be refugees.
And he grew up. And what we saw seemed to be the opposite to a conquering warrior that we would expect of a prince.
Instead, this Messiah taught his followers to do crazy things like love your enemies and to pray for those who persecute you. And he said to them, if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.
That is not a very good military strategy. And he says, whoever wants to become first among you must become the very last and become a slave of all. See, it's no wonder that the disciples started to question whether he was really the Messiah, this conquering prince that the Old Testament spoke about.
[4:55] They must have been wondering, and how is he going to establish and expand God's kingdom unless he fights the enemies of God's people, the Romans and the other pagan Gentiles that were threatening them. And so they were confused.

But you see, what they forgot about Isaiah's prophecy was that this prince is not going to be a prince of war. He's going to be a prince of peace. Unlike any human prince and commander of troops before him, this prince was going to advance his father's kingdom not through war, but through peace.
Which seems bizarre. How do you do that? How do you expand a kingdom through peace? You know, in what war ever did the general address his troops and say, okay, boys, we've come up with a strategy to break through the enemy's lines and take over their HQ.
This is what we're going to do. We're going to pray for them and be really, really nice to them. And if we see any of them, we're going to feed them and make sure they've got all the supplies they need. And if they attack us, we're not going to fight back. That general would lose his job, right? If that was his strategy. And yet that's how Jesus says he's going to beat the enemies of God's people.
[6:05] It's bizarre. But to understand how that makes any sense at all, you first got to understand who the real enemy of God's people is. You see, their enemy wasn't actually the Romans or the Assyrians or the Babylonians.

It was sin and Satan. The spiritual enemies, intelligent beings. Remember in Ephesians, when we looked at spiritual warfare, we learned from the Bible that there are invisible, intelligent forces at work.
Enemies of God and enemies of God's people. And they are actually at the root of all the physical conflict we see in this world. All the wars. All the fights at home.
All the road rage. All the conflict between human beings are actually rooted in sin here and Satan there. Outside. Influencing.
Constantly at work. And we learned that in Genesis. We learned that the root of human conflict was actually Satan himself. You'll remember we read about a time when humans actually did live in peace in Eden.
[7:13] It was a good world. It had no conflict. There was peace between humans and humans and animals and humans and God. Everything was working like it should, like God designed it to.

By the way, God did not intend or design the world to be like this. This is a broken world. It's one of the key truths of the Christian worldview in the Bible.
This is not how it's meant to be. We do have a picture of how it was meant to be in Eden. When there's peace, there's order, there's no hostility. That was until it didn't last long.
It was basically two chapters in the Bible. The first two chapters before Satan launched his attack. But what was interesting is he didn't use conventional weapons. Now all he needed to do was to use deception to turn the humans against each other and against God.
And then, you know, he just sowed the seeds of conflict and then sat back and watched them grow. And so that is the enemy that Jesus knew as the prince to defend and expand his father's kingdom.
[8:17] He needed to fight. That is the enemy that Jesus was born to defeat. And so he knew he wouldn't be able to do that through fighting because that's what gives his enemy strength.

Conflict. No, the only way to really defeat Satan was to do something he never expected. And that was to attack his kingdom with peace. And to teach his followers to do the same.
To love those we consider our enemies. To not need revenge when someone hurts you. To show grace to people who didn't do anything to deserve it. Because you know what?

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When we do those things, Satan does not know what to do with that. He does not know how to respond to that. He doesn't know how to respond to grace. He doesn't know how to respond to us loving our enemies.
He's just not equipped for that. And so that is the secret weapon that Jesus, the prince of peace, came to fight evil with. Which he wants us, his followers, to be able to wield as well that weapon of peace.
[9:22] It's bizarre. It's an oxymoron. Weapon of peace. But that's his secret weapon. Peace. It's just something that Satan wasn't prepared for. He can't defend against. And so he says to us, blessed are the peacemakers.

Because they will be called children of God. That's in his Sermon on the Mount. Those who take initiative to seek peace rather than conflict. When actually conflict is the thing that we're naturally wired for.
Or, you know, when there's domestic conflict. Husband and wife fighting. Or children fighting with each other. Boys and girls. Brothers and sisters.
Or actually, it doesn't stop just as children. Brothers and sisters still fight when they're grown-ups, don't they? All of this fighting. You know what happens. I mean, I don't need to tell you. Someone is offended. Their pride is hurt.
Or they're insulted or something. And they lash out in retaliation. And then the other person retaliates back to their retaliation. And then just continues in a cycle of conflict.
[10:23] I mean, it happens on political level with wars. If you study any war, that's what happened. But in the wars in the home as well. And then to break that cycle, there needs to be one person who actually takes the initiative not to retaliate.

And to be a peacemaker. And God says, that's what my people are going to do. The disciples of Jesus. Those are the ones who are called to be the ones who stop the cycle of conflict.
The peacemakers. And those are the ones who prove that they're children of God, Jesus says. And that's also, strangely enough, how God's kingdom on earth will be advanced.
And will grow. By us showing the world what grace and peace really look like. But let's be honest. That's really hard, isn't it?
Because as I said, we're not wired that way. We struggle to do the things Jesus calls of us. To love our enemies. To show grace, undeserved favor.
[11:23] When the world, as well as our instincts, tell us, no, we must fight back. Don't they? Our instincts say we must retaliate. We must fight back. But so does the world.

You remember back in 1993, the St. James Massacre. Our sister church in Kenilworth was attacked by terrorists. Many people were killed. After they kind of, after the initial shock, the world was watching.
Not just the country, but the world was watching. Because everybody was very interested in what was happening in South Africa in 93. And the church came out. Frank Ketiff was the rector at the time. And they said, we forgive our enemies.
We forgive those who attacked us. And we're praying for them. You know what was surprising about that? Is how many people lashed out against St. James for responding in that way?
They said, no, you must fight back. See, that's what the world does. The world tells us we must fight back. We must stand our ground. We mustn't let our pride be hurt.
[12:25] The world pressurizes us to hate our enemies. And our instincts want revenge as well. It's a lethal combination. And so the only way that we can possibly do what Jesus calls us as his followers to do and pursue peace.

And be the ones who are the peacemakers. The only way that can be done. The only way you can show Christ's grace to the people around you who don't deserve it. Is if you first realize that grace was already shown to you and you didn't deserve it.
That is the only way. Romans 5.8 says. And by the way. That's why Christians are really the only people equipped to be peacemakers.
Because they're the people who realize that was done for them. By definition that's what a Christian is. Someone who realizes they have benefited from the grace of God in Christ on the cross. Without them deserving it.
So Romans 5.8 says. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners Christ died for us. That's what a Christian believes. While we were still sinners Christ died for us.

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[13:27] Not once we had made peace Christ died for us. Or once we had come to our senses. Or once we had realized what we had done wrong and apologized then Christ died for us. No. While we were still sinners.

While we were still in open rebellion against God. Jesus entered our world to die for us. Instead of punish us for that sin and rebellion which he had every right to do.
Not only did he hold back that punishment for our sins that we deserve. But he took it on himself. He redirected it onto himself. And he was punished instead on the cross to bring us peace.
That is the prince of peace. That is that on the cross. That was his atomic bomb against Satan's kingdom. That's how he saved us. And that's why we can now not only have peace.
But show peace. In how we deal with the people around us in our lives. So I wonder what people God has put in your life.
[14:25] Who you have an opportunity to show peace towards. When they least expect it. When they don't deserve it. That is if the prince of peace is in charge of your life.

You know is that evident? Is the fact that he is in charge of your life. Evident in your home. If I went and asked your neighbors. Does the prince of peace rule in that person's home?
I wonder what they'd say. You know if I asked your work colleagues. Does the prince of peace rule in that person's life? And horror of horrors if I asked your spouse.
I mean it's quite convicting isn't it? If the prince of peace. That's what he's called. If he rules in our life. That should be seen in how we deal. In our personal relationships. What people has God put in your life.
Who you have the opportunity to show. Undeserved grace and peace towards. Next time you feel conflict brewing. Therefore in your home. Or in a relationship.
[15:26] Remember Jesus' words. Blessed are the peacemakers. For they will be called children of God. And learn. God's people must learn. How to wield the one weapon. That Satan doesn't know how to deal with.

Peace. Because as you learn to do that more and more. In this world. You actually begin to show off. To the world. What the new creation will be like.
You get to act as a signpost. For the new world. Because that's what God's people. Are here for. He's. Christians. Believers. He saved us. Through faith.
And what Jesus did for us on the cross. But he left us here. Not just. To wait. For the new creation. But to actively live lives. That show the world around us. What the new creation is going to be like. Where peace will be the order of the day. Because the prince of peace will reign supreme. And so I want to read to you again from. Isaiah 11. What John read for us earlier.
[16:20] Because listen to how. Isaiah describes. This new world. He says this. The wolf. Will live with the lamb. The leopard.

Will lie down with the goat. The calf. And the lion. And the yearling together. And a little child. Will lead them. The cow. Will feed with the bear. Their young.
Will lie down together. And the lion. Will eat straw. Like an ox. The infant. Will play near the cobra's den. And the young child. Will put its hand. Into the viper's nest. They will neither harm.
Nor destroy. On all my holy mountain. For the earth. Will be filled. With the knowledge of the Lord. As waters cover the sea. This is a beautiful picture. Isn't it? Of the world to come.
That Isaiah. Has been given. A revelation of. That he foresees. A world. Where what was previously. At war. Is now at peace. Even in the animal kingdom. Wolves.
[17:17] That used to hunt lambs. And are chilling out together. Shooting the breeze. Because. The truth is. Animals also live. In a constant state of war. Don't they? I mean. We see springboks.

Jumping across the savannah. And we think. Oh they're having a lovely. Jump through the long grass. Enjoying the day. With not a care in the world. You know. It's a lovely picture. We take photographs of it. When actually.
In their minds. They're probably like. Yeah. We're out in cover. Get to cover. There's cheetahs all over the place. Move. Move. Move. Get out of the way. No. Move. They're all trying to get out of the way. Because they're all.
Their instincts are telling them. They're in danger. That's how most animals live. In the wild. In a state of war. Because. We're in a broken world. A world of. Conflict. Even the animal kingdom.
Is in a state of war. It's not cute and fluffy. But it's vicious. And violent. On Friday. They. I think. They. Because. I finished my Christmas sermon. By the end of Thursday.

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[18:11] I was very proud of that. We. We took a day. We went. With the kids. To the. Izeco. Natural History Museum. In Cape Town. I think it's called the South African Museum. Where you see these. Life size.

Reproductions. Of animals. I think. I think. They're. What's it called? When they're. Injected. With. What? Taxidermed. Animals. But anyway, they're amazing to look.
There was one with a hyena and a lion with just blood coming out of their mouth and bits of animal. And I took a photograph of Amy, and I was glad, even though it was dead, that there was a glass between that.
And it was just vicious looking. And you can see, you just go through these exhibits, and it's just animals eating animals and survival of the fittest. And it's just a vicious world. Anyway, we went also, they had a special exhibit I would recommend it, the World Wildlife Photographer of the Year Award.
And the winner was this one. A lion getting irritated by a hyena trying to steal its prey. And the photographer had the little story.
[19:15] So this was the winner of the World Wildlife 2018. And the photographer says the lion had caught this prey, and then the hyena, like hyenas do, decided to come and try to steal it.

Eventually, the lion just had enough and did this. And the hyena was very irritated, you can see. He didn't expect that. But then, what the photographer didn't capture, but he said happened, is the hyena yelped.
And his yelp called other hyenas. And in a few minutes, there was a whole pack of about 50 hyenas come to confront this one lion who then had to leave his prey to save his own life.
But that's just everyday war going on in nature. It's not cute and fluffy. It's vicious. And I think that photograph kind of depicts that. But you know what?
That war in nature, if we look at what the Bible says, and we understand why the world is like it is, we realize that warfare in nature, just like the warfare amongst humans, is actually because of sin.
[20:15] It wasn't always like that. Before humans sinned and were cut off from God, we're told they, Adam, exercised God's authority over the animals.

And the animals actually all listened to him. It blows our mind to think wild animals would have obeyed, but they did. He could have just told that hyena and that lion, hey, stop fighting.
Sit. And they would have just sat. Just obeyed. Now, don't be silly. They can share. He would have been able to do that. You see, they would have obeyed. There was no conflict.
Because, why was there no conflict? Because there was rule and order in creation. Not chaos and disorder and death. And no scarcity either. So, the lion and the hyena could have both had their food.
And besides, they wouldn't have eaten another animal. They would have been eating vegetables. They would have been vegans. But there was true peace in that creation. True peace because there was that order.
[21:13] Because humans had authority over the animal kingdom. And that is a peace that we're told will be restored one day in the new creation. Nature itself will be at peace again.

You'll be able to swim at beaches like Fishhook no matter what flag is flying. And there will be no need for flags. You'll be able to swim with the sharks. Stroke them. Ride on their fins.
Crazy. But that's the kind of picture we're given here. And natural disasters will cease as well. Which is just another mark of a broken world. Tsunamis and earthquakes and disease.
Sickness. Which I think sooner or later we all suffer from. They will also be a thing of the past, we're told. I mean you read that beautiful depiction of the new creation in Revelation.
God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. All the things that cause suffering and death before will be no more. But most of all, so there will be peace between people and nature.
[22:13] But most of all there will be peace between people and people. There will be no divisions anymore. No racism. No land grabs. No inequality. And I think that we can see that in this passage.

It's implied I think. By the types of animals represented here. Because there's also a symbolic aspect to this passage. In Isaiah 11. And this is something that a Jew would have picked up quite quickly.
But most of us probably wouldn't. And that is that each of the pairs of animals that are given here. Wolf and lamb. Leopard and goat. Calf and lion. Each pair includes one unclean animal and one clean animal.

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According to the Jewish ceremonial law. And it's no mistake. I think the reason is probably to represent both the Jewish world and the Gentile world now at peace together.
What was previously off limits and separated. Animals as well as people. Nations. Races. Would now be brought together. And included in God's kingdom. The dividing lines would be removed.
[23:10] And that is because again we read in Ephesians. The dividing lines between people are removed. Because of what Jesus did on the cross. For all who believe. No matter what their skin color. No matter what their culture. No matter what their status.

You see. No matter how unworthy people might be. Which we all are. To be in God's kingdom. To be in his restored creation one day. Jesus died to take our unworthiness on himself.
So that he can give us his worthiness. And anyone who trusts in him and follows him. Is then therefore worthy of God's new creation. Because of Jesus' merits.
Not our own. That's the gospel. And that's another reason there will be true peace in the new world. Because everybody there will know that they don't deserve to be there. And so there will be no entitlement.
You see. As long as a person thinks they are more deserving than the next person. There will always be conflict. Won't there? Second world war. Started because one race.
[24:11] Thought that they were superior to every other race on the planet. Apartheid in our own country. And the suffering in apartheid was due to that same thinking.

One race more deserving than another. Well you see the cross. Jesus on the cross is the ultimate antidote to that type of thinking. The cross tells us. None of us deserve to be part of God's kingdom. And yet we can be. Because it's entered through faith in Jesus and not what we've done. And so by definition. The coming kingdom will only be filled with people who know they don't deserve to be there.
And that's why it will be a kingdom of peace as well. But most of all. Most of all we will be at peace with each other. And at peace with creation.
Because we will finally be at peace with our creator. And we will know him. In real. Full. Uninterrupted.
[25:09] Relationship. The relationship that we were made for. And that we find our ultimate joy and satisfaction in. Because look at verse 9 again. It's a beautiful verse. They will neither harm nor destroy.

On all my holy mountain. For. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. As the waters cover the sea. And so the ultimate reason.
There will be peace in the new world order that Jesus is bringing. Is because everybody there will finally know God fully. He will be completely revealed to us.
And we will know and experience his glory. Without limit. And without our sin. Getting in the way and spoiling that. And when you taste that glory. When you taste the glory of God.
You will never want to sin again. Because the truth is. We only sin. Because we want something we haven't got. Right? Because we feel entitled to something we haven't got.
[26:06] Or we want it. Or we're coveting it. Or whatever. We sin because we want something we haven't got. Or because we feel offended. And we want to retaliate. Because our pride has been hurt.

We want the respect we haven't got. That's the reason we lash out. That's the reason we are in conflict with people. You could say the conflict in our world is actually all rooted in unfulfilled desires.
But you see when we truly know God. We will have no unfulfilled desires. We will have no feelings of inadequacy. We will have no want of anything. No stress. No anxiety.
Because we will know God fully. And so we will finally live in the perfect peace that we've always longed for. But here's the amazing thing. And this is what I want you to leave with today.
We can start knowing that peace. That new creation peace. Even now in this old creation. We can start experiencing flashes of that peace.
[27:05] More and more as we get to know God. More and more. In this broken world. I mean I wouldn't start hanging out with lions just yet. But if you've had your sins forgiven through Jesus.

You can even now tap into the peace of the new world. That Paul says surpasses all understanding. Why? Because you have a real relationship with God. That's what Jesus died to give you.

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If you're a Christian, a believer, a follower of Christ. You have a real relationship with the creator of the universe. The one in control of all things. The one that you were made to enjoy.
And yes, in this world you do not get to experiencing him like you will one day. We see through a mirror darkly. Paul says it's not what it's going to be.
But you can still know him more and more each day through prayer and the word. In fact, when Paul says knowing a peace that transcends all understanding, he's talking about our prayer lives. And that's one of the ways we tap into that peace because that is the way we exercise relationship with God.
[28:08] We don't only pray when we need things from God. He's not just a vending machine in the sky. We pray as a means of exercising relationship just like you do with another human being. We've been given the privilege of prayer.

The privilege of relating with our creator who Jesus has removed the barrier of sin from. And that, in that relationship, and that relationship alone is where true peace is found.
And you can have that. You can have that peace today because the Prince of Peace has come.
Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for these last four weeks that we've been able to explore. These names that you are given by the prophet. That he has been revealed. He was revealed that you would be and you would fulfill and the role you would take.
Lord, we thank you that we've got to understand you deeper. We've got to know you more. We thank you, Lord, that you came to fight our enemies through peace, not through war.
[29:10] And, Lord, we pray that you'd help us to do the same. Help us to be peacemakers. And, Lord, help us to be signposts for the world to come. And in our lives, would you help us to glorify you and to not only show the world peace, but to really know the peace that you came to give us in our relationship with our creator.

Help us to enjoy him and to look forward to the day when we will know him fully. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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