

Sermon: 12/8/24

“The Majesty of Peace”

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Micah 5:2-4, Luke 1:26-38

Good morning Shepherd Church! I am glad to see you all here with us on the second Sunday of this Advent season. This is my favorite time of the year and I hope that this is a season of joy and rest and especially peace for you and your family.

And it is peace that I want to talk about today, because the child announced to Mary that we just read about would be known as The Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6 says of Jesus' birth “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.”

What a destiny that baby in the manger had before him.

You see, that is the thing I like most about Christmas. There is the joy, yes and the celebration of it all, but for me, it is the heaviness of that event that really resonates.

For thousands of years mankind has been held captive by sin, and the people of God have looked forward to the arrival of the Messiah, and now, in the passage we read today, his day is almost here.

And Mary and Joseph and those who bore witness to these events could never have understood the significance of it like we do today because they did not know the full story. They had the angel's explanation, that he would save his people from their sins

but they did not know just how he would end up accomplishing that task. It would have been too much for them at the time.

But we know what he had to face. Imagine learning before he is born that your child had come to die, and it was God's will for him to do so.

It's in the infant Jesus that it's easiest for us to see what was true of Jesus for his entire life. He truly was the innocent, perfect, spotless lamb of God. The man who died on the cross did not deserve his punishment any more than the baby in the manger did.

His life would not be peaceful, and yet he would be known as the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 53 says "He was despised and abandoned by men, a man of great pain and familiar with sickness; and like one from whom people hide their faces. He was despised, and we had no regard for him."

Jesus' life, through no fault of his own, was one of turmoil, rejection, and pain. He was despised by his people, abandoned by his friends and murdered by those he came to save. But through it all, he carried himself with a spirit of peace.

Jesus came to bring peace to the world but he also set an example for us of how to live a life of peace when the circumstances of your life are not peaceful at all. There was never a moment in the life of Christ in which he did not know peace.

How can you say that Pastor Shawn? Didn't Jesus cry tears of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane? Didn't Jesus go into the wilderness to mourn the loss of John the Baptist? Did he not feel pain when he looked into the eyes of Judas day after day, knowing that one day his friend would sell him to his enemies?

That's all true. Jesus was a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief.

But the reason he could have peace when he didn't feel peace, was because **true peace is not an emotion you feel.**

And that's a wonderful thing because our feelings change but peace is more dependable than that. Peace is not dependent upon whether good things or bad things are happening in our lives. Peace doesn't come from our circumstances.

So what is peace and where does it come from? Write this down for me if you please.

Peace is a gift. And the giver is God.

Psalms 29:11 says "The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace."

True peace is a gift from God. And what he gives is his presence and his promises.

In John 16:32, Jesus says "A time is coming, and in fact has come, when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me." And in Hebrews 12:2, we read of Jesus that "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Jesus knew where peace was found. He knew the Father was with him. And he knew that God would raise him from the dead, and he found strength in that promise. And notice that it was not for the joy around him, or the joy within him that Jesus endured the cross. There was no joy to be found in those places. He endured the cross for the joy set before him.

He had the presence of God to comfort him and the promise of God to give him hope. And that's why hours before his arrest, Jesus said to his disciples. "Peace I leave you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, nor fearful."

Because he had real peace, peace from above, he could still be concerned about others in the midst of his own trials. Do you want to know if you have real peace, God's peace? If you can still be concerned with others when your life is falling apart, that's a good sign.

Because when we're unhappy and in pain it's easy to make everything about ourselves. And when that happens we need to seek out the Lord and fill up the tank again. Jesus felt his peace starting to slip that night and so he sought out his father to be filled with it once more.

Luke 22:39 "And he came out and went, as was His habit, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed him. Now when he arrived at the place, he said to them "Pray that you do not come into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and he knelt down and began to pray saying "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Now an angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him.

When he brought his pain and suffering to the father, the Father gave him peace in return. And what happened after that? With renewed strength, our Lord rose from prayer and walked with courage to meet the mob that was coming to arrest him.

Philippians 4:6-7 says “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Isaiah 26:3 says “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast because they trust in you.”

As I look out at all of you this morning, I can say with confidence that for some of you, you are not happy this holiday season. You are dealing with real stuff in your life. Burdens so heavy you feel like you’re being buried under them.

You’re here and maybe you’ve been putting on a brave face, but inside you’re crumbling. You’ve been stringing up your Christmas lights and shopping for the people on your list and you have your nativity set out on the lawn, but inside your heart is broken and trembling.

And to you I want to say this morning that Advent is not just a time in which we celebrate the innocence of the baby in manger but a time that we remember the man that that baby grew up to be and the suffering that he overcame as an example to us.

In John 16:33 Jesus says “These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Because of what Jesus did on the cross, if you know him as Lord, your suffering has an expiration date. There will be a day with no more tears and no more pain.

Psalms 30:5 says “One may experience sorrow during the night, but joy comes in the morning.”

Heaven is our ultimate hope. There is no pain we can experience on earth that won't be worth it in heaven.

But there is hope for our lives here on Earth as well. And that's because the God who is waiting for us in heaven is here with us on earth too. And he has a habit, in his kindness and mercy, of revealing beauty from the ashes of the lowest moments of our lives. You have never been in a hopeless situation, because there has never been a situation in your life beyond God's power to work for his glory and your good.

The God who turned the murder of his son into the salvation of the world can redeem any evil you have ever suffered.

But I know from experience how hard it can be to have hope when the obstacles in front of you seem so huge.

Most of you will know that I have a two year old son and a baby girl at home. And what that means practically is that every once in a while me and my son get kicked out of the house so that Mom and baby can have a little peace and quiet. And what Nathan and I like to do is take some of his toys and go sit at the top of the driveway and play there for a bit.

And so Nathan will be playing with toy cars and I'll just be sitting there, looking down at the ground, and I always end up watching these trains of ants going back and forth across the pavement.

And sometimes I'll take a piece of gravel or something and plop it down right in the middle of the line just to see what happens. **And everyone's done this so don't look at me like that.** You know what happens, they kind of scatter around and panic for a

minute because their trail has been interrupted. And because I'm a merciful giant, after a minute or two, I'll move the piece of gravel, and there they'll go, on their way again.

You know, to those ants, that piece of gravel was the size of a house. A massive, unexplained, unplanned problem that just comes down out of nowhere and blocks out anything and everything else. But I'm a lot bigger than they are, so to me, that rock is smaller than the tip of my finger.

Sometimes I think Christians get it wrong when we walk about adversity. Because we talk about it as if we are supposed to pretend that the obstacles we face in this life are small. But they are not small. The rock was bigger than the ants. Our problems can be very big, much bigger than we are, and many times they're far beyond our ability to manipulate or change.

But as we grow in our faith we realize that God does not help us by making our problems smaller so that we can handle them, he helps us by showing us how big he is in comparison.

As a Pastor you hear things from time to time that sound very profound but aren't actually true. One of them is this "God will never give you more than you can handle."

That's not a true statement. That's not biblical. David couldn't handle Goliath on his own. The Apostle Paul and the first Christians could not face down the Roman Empire on their own. There are lots of things too big for us. But there's nothing too big for him.

There is no trouble in your life that can overpower the Lord. You are not without hope. God wants to be your hope. And you can only find peace in him.

He's bigger than your fear, bigger than your grief, bigger than your pain. And he is generous to lend his strength to us in times of need.

When the Apostle Paul faced troubles he could not bear, he prayed to God and God answered him and told him this. 2 Corinthians 12:9 "But he said to me "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

His power is made perfect in your weakness. His grace is sufficient for you. He is enough for you. He is all that you need.

You know what I have discovered? There are lots of times I was in a situation so dark I did not think I could keep going. But with Jesus, I took one step and then the next and then the next, and before I knew it, the dark clouds passed away and I was enjoying life again. It doesn't mean that your problems, your grief, your hurts go completely away. Some wounds are only going to heal in heaven.

But it does mean that over time we realize that the bible is true when it says in Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

And that means in the good things and the bad, God is working for your ultimate good and his ultimate glory. His peace passes all understanding.

But here's the deal, everything I have talked about this morning only works if you know the Lord. C.S. Lewis said "God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from himself because it is not there. There is no such thing."

Peace is a gift from God, but you have to know him in order to receive it. You can't go up to someone you don't know and be like "It's my birthday today, where's my present?"

It doesn't work like that. God and peace are a package deal. You can't have one without the other.

But once you have God, the peace he gives you is not dependent on anything else in your life. And you can endure far more than you ever thought possible and come out the other side with a joyous hope that makes no sense unless there's a God in heaven.

As I was searching for an illustration to ground this sermon this week, I came across the story of Darlene Diebler.

She was a young missionary woman who was captured by the Japanese in New Guinea during World War Two. Her husband Russel was taken to a prison camp and killed, and she herself was imprisoned for years in a camp for women, where they were treated brutally and used as slave labor. And because she was an American she was taken by the Japanese and tortured by the secret police on suspicion of being a spy.

She spent months in a secret prison, being beaten and starved daily. She was given a half cup of runny rice porridge per day, and no other food or fluids. And there were maggots and worms in the rice. If she stepped on a bug and stained the floor of her cell, they would beat her because she was expected to keep her cell clean.

But through it all Darlene prayed and Darlene served. At the labor camp, she filled in for women who were sick and led a bible study in her dormitory until they took the bible away. And at the prison where she was tortured, she would repeat verses she

had memorized to herself in her cell. And every time she prayed, she said it was like God was in the room with her, holding her upright when all she wanted to do was fall down and give up.

One day the commandant of the labor camp, Mr. Yamaji, called her into his office and informed her that her husband had died. Darlene felt the weight of the darkness closing in on her, and she was stricken with grief so heavy so knew she could not bear up under it. But she prayed and she felt the Lord's hand upon her, and she looked Mr. Yamaji in the eyes and said "I won't hate you or your people Mr. Yamaji. Maybe that's why I have been brought here to suffer, so that I could be the one to tell you that Jesus loves you and he died to save you from your sins."

The commandment left the room quickly, and she could hear him sobbing to himself for hours and hours in the back of the house. And when the secret police came finally to execute her, it was Mr. Yamaji who said to them "A woman like that, who believes what she believes, could never do these things you are accusing her of." And her life was spared.

The war did eventually end. The Camp was liberated.

And Darlene and the ladies were freed. And Mr. Yamaji was executed for war crimes. He had murdered prisoners in the camp. But Darlene saw a change in him after that day in his office, and she testified that she believed he gave his life to the Lord that day.

And Darlene would remarry and return to serve in New Guinea for most of the rest of her life, and until she passed away she testified that it was only Jesus that got her through what she endured, but that he was more than enough for her.

If you're interested in learning more, Darlene wrote an autobiography called "Evidence Not Seen", which is a reference to Hebrews 11:1 "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

In the darkest moments of her ordeal, Darlene would recite a poem to herself, by Annie Johnson Flint, that she had memorized as a child. Some of you may recognize these words. I would like to share the first verse 1 with you now.

***1. He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength as our labors increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials He multiplies peace.***

Whatever you are going through today, no matter how dark your future seems, or what grief from the past is still weighing you down, lay it all down before the Lord. Give all your cares and worries to God because he cares about what happens to you. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

He is there. He is waiting. He offers his peace to you. You are not alone, and you never have been. Reach out to him today.

Let's Pray: