

The Arrival of the King - who brings peace

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- [0 : 00] Peace on earth, peace on earth and goodwill to all men. That is the Christmas sentiment, isn't it? How high on your wish list is peace on earth and goodwill to all men and women? What chance do you give it this year? Pick any major human conflicts. Protestants, Catholics, Russia, Ukraine, Shiite, Sunni, Jew, Palestinian, closer to home, liberal, conservative.
- This Christmas, what chance do you give peace on earth? Pick any major human attempt at peace. So what chance do you give the UN at uniting the nations this year?
- How united is the United Kingdom? With Brexit talks going so badly, what sort of union is the European one? And with Trump versus everyone, how united are the states of America?
- What chance do you give peace on earth this Christmas? Well, it turns out that one Christmas, for one Christmas, during a major human conflict, there was peace on earth and goodwill to all men.
- [1 : 14] It was Christmas 1914, five months into World War I, and between the trenches of German and allied soldiers was the strangest peace ever. I wonder if you know this story.
- I just met Hans, a German. I wonder if Hans was taught this story as well. Enemy soldiers celebrated Christmas together. They exchanged tobacco and souvenirs, and rumor has it they even played a soccer match.
- Although, who takes a soccer ball to the front lines? I'll never know. But anyway, Henry Williamson, a 19-year-old private in the London Rifle Brigade, he wrote this letter. He said, Dear Mother, I'm writing from the trenches.
- In my mouth is a pipe with tobacco in it. But wait, in the pipe is German tobacco from a German soldier. Yes, a live German soldier from his own trench.
- Yesterday, the British and Germans met and shook hands in the grounds between the trenches in no man's land, and we exchanged souvenirs. Yes, all Christmas Day, even as I write.
- [2 : 20] Here was a Christmas where mortal enemies shared or enjoyed peace on earth for a time. You see, that is the key, for a time.
- The next day, as everyone knows, and that night, in fact, they went back to killing one another, which is crazy. Over 100 million people died violently in human conflicts this past 100 years.
- It has not been a very, it's been a very dark time for our world. Don't you wish there was peace on earth this Christmas? And if you like, that is exactly what God's people wanted in Isaiah's Israel, 700 BC.
- Have a look at your Bibles, page 687, and pick up your handouts. We're at point one. You see, even in God's own country, Israel, peace was very rare.
- Israel was a divided nation. The ten tribes to the north called Israel. They were invaded by Samaria, the bottom kingdom of Judah, which has Jerusalem and the temple in it, that was about to be invaded by nations as well.

[3 : 32] Isaiah 7 tells us that Samaria and Syria marched up to fight against Judah, where God's temple was. To make matters worse, in chapter 7, verse 17, Assyria comes to attack everyone.

Assyria was the superpower of the day. It will not be a happy new year for God's people. Assyria eventually attacks in 722 BC.

They sweep away the whole northern kingdom forever. To this day, what we call Israel is actually just a portion of the southern kingdom of Judah, after centuries of never-ending conflicts.

You see, after Samaria came Syria, and then Assyria, and then Babylon, and then Persia, and then Greece, and then the Romans.

There was always another enemy on the horizon. Peace was very rare. It's the same thing, this side of history, actually. After World War I, the war to end all wars, came World War II.

[4 : 35] And then the Cold War with the communists, and then Vietnam. After the Taliban came Al-Qaeda, and then ISIS, and so on and so forth.

There's always another enemy on the horizon. Don't you want peace on earth? Just for a day, like Christmas in 1914. Well, Isaiah looks forward to a day like that.

In verse 1, we started in gloom and distress, but that is about to change. Because in the humble lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, something is beginning.

Verse 2, the people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. And Isaiah's dawn is more than sort of souvenirs and soccer matches.

It is a nationwide party. Verse 3, you have enlarged the nation and increased their joy. They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

[5 : 39] Four times in a verse, it speaks of joy and rejoicing, like the joy of a harvest for farming people, or the joy of victory for afflicted people.

And why? Because of verse 4. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

See, throughout Israel's history, they were often oppressed by bigger, stronger countries. And just as when they were oppressed by the Midianites, Isaiah speaks of a day when God will shatter the yoke and the bar and the rod of their oppressor.

Verse 5, This is picture language of the end of war, the end of human conflicts.

I wonder, I tried to find this on Google, but you can't, but imagine how many tons of military boots there are and have been used. Can you imagine the bonfire, if you put them all on flames?

[6 : 52] Imagine how many military, sorry, how many millions or billions of military garments, or bloodied military garments, there have been in human history. Can you imagine the fire, if you put that all on top?

Not just a fire for a day, but it would burn forever, never to be needed again. You see, for Isaiah, one day of peace, like in 1914, was not enough.

He speaks of a new age, verse 2, total joy, verse 3, because God will shatter oppression, verse 4. He will end or burn up war forever, verse 5.

See, only God can give a peace, the way Isaiah describes. And here is the moment, verse 6. Verse 6, 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. Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end.

[7 : 57] He will reign on David's throne, and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness, from that time on and forever. The zeal, or the drive, the motivation of the Lord Almighty, will accomplish this.

It does raise the question, how is a baby going to achieve, or usher in this dawn of peace? One person doesn't seem nearly enough.

Plenty of one persons have tried. Gandhi, Mandela, the Dalai Lama, Bob Geldof, John Lennon. Surely more is needed than one person.

But we have to remember that God's ways are not our ways. God often gets victory through very weak things. You can see a clue of that in verse one.

Because God wants to begin this new age in Zebulun and Naphtali, of all places. We don't know where they are, but verse one tells us it's a very humbled or disgraced place.

[9 : 04] So imagine if we were going to start a new country in Australia, and we built our parliament house, not in Canberra or Melbourne, but in some tiny backwater town.

That's what we're talking about. At the Battle of Midian, verse four, that's from Judges chapter six and seven. God deliberately uses an army of just 300 men to defeat a massive nation.

300 against a massive nation. It's probably where the movie comes from. But he does that just so he alone would get the glory. And here, when it comes to world peace, instead of using the most mighty military force on earth, he uses a baby.

A baby. It's no mystery that this baby is Jesus. That's not a riddle. God, again, will get victory over the most undefeated enemy, death and sin.

In the most unlikely and weak looking way, by sending his son to die on a cross. And some babies, they arrive with big expectations, like Prince William has a little baby George and Charlotte.

[10 : 16] Big expectations for the future kings and queens. This year, my daughter Penelope was born accidentally on the doorstep of our house. And so Rachel and I have no idea what our expectations for her are.

Maybe they can only go up, I think. But Isaiah expects this son to be a ruler. Verse six, the government will be on his shoulders.

And of the increase of greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end. Naming babies is pretty serious business. Lots of arguments and negotiating between mums and dads.

Some of the babies born in our church this year, so Penelope, Elka, Sophie, Cheyenne, Eleanor, and the latest one, little Jamie, who's over there. I doubt a Gill and Mel, who names Jamie.

I doubt Gill and Mel were debating whether to call Jamie wonderful counselor, or mighty God. That might be a bit cheeky, I think. Everlasting father for a baby, odd.

[11 : 18] Prince of peace. Daniel Andrews, he recently swept back into power, didn't he, a few weeks ago. But what if Jesus, the wonderful counselor, was the new premier?

He would easily solve our transport and crime issues in Victoria. If you read the Gospels, you see Jesus amaze people with his wisdom.

His enemies constantly throw attacks at him, constantly twist the law to trap him, but they can never get close. He dumbfounds people with his sermon on the mount.

Still revolutionary in a culture where anything goes. Another name for Jesus is mighty God. The only way you can end war forever is if you can face the armies of the world the way we face ants, and be able to squash them.

In the Gospels, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus will command a storm to be quiet. The way a parent silences a naughty child, because the storm has not forgotten its master's voice.

[12 : 28] His power over sickness and death, as though they were just sort of, you know, dirt on your skin. He takes on legions of demons and evil, sends them packing with just a word.

See, Jesus' ministry is a three-year window into the kingdom of heaven. It's a try before you buy, if you like. And when you read the eyewitness accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the only logical answer for his power is that he is the mighty God, as Isaiah predicted.

Everlasting Father, that's another name. Only God is everlasting. But you remember last week, Andrew Price showed us that Jesus was the word who was with God, and was God.

All the power of God, but all the care of the very best Father. And his last name here, Prince of Peace. I think that seems to be expressing what Jesus is best at.

So, Roger Federer, King of Tennis, obviously. My mum, Queen of Curries, obviously. Jesus, Prince of Peace.

[13 : 38] It's his speciality. It's what he's best at. And the Bible presents two views of peace. So, the very end of the Bible revelation, Jesus destroys God's enemies, and establishes cosmic peace and prosperity.

That's what Isaiah looks forward to. But before the end of the Bible, in the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we meet a Jesus who lives out perfect peace.

So, he turns the other cheek. He allows himself to be arrested. He willingly goes to the cross and dies. And that is where we realize that world peace has no easy solutions.

There are no pat answers here. Even for Jesus, even Jesus' own example and teaching is not enough. Even Jesus has to die for it.

This Christmas baby must die. And so, this is our second point. You see, no matter how huge the conflicts are between people and people and nation and nation, they're not the most urgent conflict that needs peace.

[14 : 48] Not for Isaiah and not for Jesus. All these human conflicts are actually a result of the more urgent and deeper conflict between people and God.

See, all people are on one side. All of us. We are all on one side in a trench, shooting our bullets and our bombs at the Lord. And he's right to rule over our lives.

He's right to rule over this world. See, the real darkness of Isaiah 9 is that we're all facing God's just and measured response. In the Bible, darkness is used as a picture for God's judgment.

This is the real gloom and distress of verse 1. This is what Jesus must address if he's to bring peace on earth and goodwill to all men.

And actually, you can see that in these chapters because Isaiah tells us that after centuries and centuries, Israel had gone too far and God had had enough. And instead of repenting, they kept on going.

[15 : 54] Throughout these chapters, Israel refused to repent and ask God for peace. Have a look at 8 verse 19. Gillian did a great job of introing the darkness of them.

8 verse 19. When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? They were facing enemies on every side.

Should they not inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

Strong words, aren't they? You see, Assyria and the nations are marching to attack. They're all on the border of Judah. They go right up to the neck of Jerusalem. But instead of turning to the wonderful counselor and the prince of peace, they turn to other things like mediums and idols instead.

And so God allows Assyria to wipe them out and Babylon to judge them later on. Isaiah says that peace on earth will always be only for a time.

[17 : 01] It will always elude people while there is no peace and faith in God. And you can see that in verse 22, 8 verse 22. Then they will look towards the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom.

They will only see war at every border. And they will be thrust into the utter darkness. That is a picture of God's judgment. Very serious business.

And that makes much more sense of the gloom and darkness of Isaiah 9. Not the darkness of human conflicts per se, of war, as terrible as they are, but the experience of God's just and measured response.

But halfway through verse 1, something changes directions. Halfway through verse 1.

In the past, he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. But in the future, he will honor Galilee of the nations. By the way of Zebulun, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan.

[18 : 05] You see, something new is beginning at Zebulun and Naphtali. Verse 2 speaks of an end to God's judgment of light and dawn. The people living in the land of darkness, a light has dawned.

And where does the dawn break? Where? In the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. And that is exactly where we meet Jesus in our second reading.

So please turn to page 968. And we'll finish here. So in Matthew 4, which Errol gave us, that is exactly where we meet Jesus, where he begins his public ministry in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali.

I'll read from verse 12. Matthew 4, verse 12. When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum to the north, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah.

You see, as Jesus begins his public ministry, Matthew starts quoting Isaiah. Matthew is asking, is this the one? Is this the son? Will he live up to Isaiah's expectations?

[19 : 24] Will he do a better job than just sort of souvenirs and soccer matches? And that's interesting because the dawn doesn't break at Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

It breaks 33 years later when he begins his public ministry in Zebulun. Verse 17. From that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

Repent. You see, through Jesus, people can have a place in the kingdom of heaven. That is, peace with God. And do you see how it begins?

Similar to Isaiah's testimony of warning, Jesus preaches repentance. Repentance. One day he'll establish peace between people, but until that day comes, he is bringing peace with God.

And so he begins his public ministry by preaching a word of repentance. A message to turn away from our life of sin and rejection and turn back to God.

[20 : 33] See, that is our response. Repentance. And if all of that sounds just too cheap for a lifetime of sin, remember that Jesus' response is much more costly.

See, someone has to pay for the way. We've all turned our backs on God. Which means Jesus will have to die in our place. There are no easy solutions to peace.

Death and judgment stands over us, but Jesus offers to swallow it up on our behalf. And therefore, therefore, the preaching and the words of repentance, however uncomfortable, however oppressive it sounds, or offensive it sounds, those words are much sweeter than the words of Christmas greetings across the trenches.

Because repentance means God is offering a second and a third and a fourth and a millionth chance again. Repentance is our first step to coming back to God.

And that is the difference between Jesus and every other human attempt. Jesus comes to bring peace with God first, a permanent peace, not just a sort of Christmas Day truce.

[21 : 51] And when Jesus began preaching repentance in Galilee, when we share his words in 2018, it can be the first light of dawn for people in darkness.

And anyone, your family, your friends, your colleagues, or your classmates, if anyone is willing to respond, to crawl out of their trench in repentance and ask Jesus for peace, they can be sure of his response, the Prince of Peace.

They'll be happily accepted no matter what they've done, no matter what darkness they have walked in. That is Christian forgiveness. There is nothing like that in the universe.

Death and judgment swallowed up by Jesus. So nothing will stand between us and God. For those of you who are already Christians, which is a lot of you, for those of you who've already repented, repentance is very tough because it seems offensive, especially in a culture where you can't tell people what to do.

Repentance is tough because it's also an ongoing work in our lives. Do you think Jesus' warning here is for other people and not for you?

[23 : 09] If I could gently but firmly challenge, how is our repentance going in the parts of our lives we don't want people to see?

Repentance is different from mere remorse. Everyone feels remorse the next day. But repentance, remember, is turning back to God in all or perhaps some parts of our lives because we think we are still on the throne, as it were.

A good way to test whether we rejoice at Jesus' kingship the way Isaiah does is whether or how willing we are to repent. And also, does Jesus' urgency of repentance, does it motivate you to invite your family and friends to come to church, to hear the gospel, to speak to them, bring them along to any one of our Christmas services this year, you know they will hear Jesus' words on forgiveness and peace very clearly.

Or do you think your people are too far gone from the light of Christ? There'll be a few people in this room who haven't repented before, ever. If that's you, if you're still in your trench warring with God, please allow Jesus to give you the best gift this Christmas.

A chance to repent and have peace with God. To do that is to move from darkness to light, from judgment to peace, from the world to the kingdom of heaven.

[24 : 46] And that is more amazing than English and German troops playing soccer on a battlefield because when people do that, they will be one part of why for 2,000 years Isaiah was right.

That of the increase of Jesus' government and of peace, there will be no end. Shall we pray that God does that? Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, mighty God, wonderful counsellor, everlasting Father, we thank you that you come to bring peace with God first.

Thank you that you gave your life willingly to bring people like us out of darkness. Lord Jesus, would we repent from our own kingship and turn to your kingship?

And would we tell our family and friends about peace with you? Help us not to be afraid. Help us to be like children, fearless. please help us to see how urgent this is, how desperate darkness is.

Please would they come to our church perhaps this year. Hear your words and be saved. In Jesus' name. Amen.