

Intro: It seems self-evident to say that the world desperately needs peace today. On any given day we can turn on the news and find ample evidence of this: **war, hostility, and civil unrest**. It seems like every other day we hear about another missile test from North Korea in the direction of their neighbors, blustery talk about our military options; or the occasional house of worship coming under fire, or Sunni Muslim mosques being blown up by Isis Muslims. You name it, pick your place, pick your corner of the world, and we can find civil unrest—a world crying out for true peace.

And it was no different in Isaiah the prophet's day. By Isaiah's time (700 hundred years before Jesus' birth), the nation of Israel had been split in two. The north and the south. The northern kingdom had already fallen to **Assyria—a looming world power on their borders**. And the confederacy of nation-states was threatening Judah, the southern Kingdom of Israel. Ruled by godless Ahaz, the Jews were full of fear, despair, and a feeling of powerless against this impending foreign threat.

The Threat:

- It was a threat of permanently assimilating and oppressing the Jewish people.
- It was the taunt that God was not on their side, not among them.
- That God had no plan for them as a people.

That God had no power to stop the forces that were rolling over them.

And it is against this backdrop that God gave Ahaz and Judah a stunning answer. A sign and a wonder. A remarkable prophecy of hope that staves off Israel's judgment in exile for a century.

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

9:6-7 For to us a child is born to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**. ⁷ Of the increase of his government **and of peace there will be no end**, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

And the titles are a response to the threats and taunts.

The virgin will conceive a holy son, whose name is Immanuel (God with us).

He will rule as Wonderful Counselor—Wonderful is a divine adjective while “counselor” means an administrator who plans and designs. He is the wonderful counselor who has a plan, a design and purpose for you.

Mighty God is a war title—an awesome mighty God who is victorious in battle for his own.

Everlasting Father—is a kingly line title. God is the father of an everlasting kingdom. And all this Kingdom is waiting for is the coming of this virgin born son whose very presence means that God is now tabernacling among us. The Prince of Peace.

But the revival of hope for peace is short lived. Like I say only about 100 years and then Judah fell back on old patterns.

There is corruption and injustice among those in authority, hypocrisy among religious leaders, spiritual negligence of the people, moral and ethical insanity permeates the culture.

And so God gives them over to King Nebuchadnezzar. As a people they are devastated. Their house of worship desolated. The city of David is in ruins and its ramparts destroyed. And into exile they go.

For 70 years they remain in exile and then Daniel has a visitation from an angel who helps him interpret a passage from his Bible—the book of Jeremiah. And God’s messenger tells him that their spiritual exile will last longer than 70 years. Sure, physically they’ll return back to their land, but spiritually—their exile from relationship with God won’t end until the Messiah comes, God’s Prince. And that will be 490 years.

And the people waited, and they waited, and waited some more. Hundreds of years go by and at the dawn of the first century something awakened in this sleepy land. Something that could only be described by scholars as a true messianic fervor among the faithful, among those who studied it. A zeal to discover who the Messiah—God’s anointed King in the line of David might be.

And just as in Isaiah’s time, the people are fearful, they walk in darkness and there is rampant injustice, religious hypocrisy, spiritual negligence, moral and ethical madness, and most of all there is pervasive unrest. The average Jew may greet you in the market with the word “Shalom” but he has anything but God’s shalom—God’s peace.

Israel is still a client state of a foreign power. Taxes are compulsory and very high. Jewish insurgents are led in droves to Roman crosses and Israeli religion is carried out under the watchful eye of pagans who mock their God and sneer at their way of life.

And God has been silent for a long time. Synagogues are mere study houses, seminaries of learning about the things God used to say, when God used to speak, when he used to send angelic messengers and old prophets would comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. But the stories of David—the passionate warrior King—are all academic promises of his return—the resurgence of his everlasting line seems so distant now.

No. There is no rest in Israel. There is no peace in this land.

And God sends Gabriel his messenger to a little agrarian town in Galilee, and the prospect of peace is suddenly reborn into the world...

Scripture: Luke 1:26

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and

will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

And the Son of the Most High is born to a lowly family, in humble circumstances. And the peace he brings is true panacea for what ails men.

And just like the first century—just like 700 years prior to this sign coming into the world—there is great fear, **rampant injustice, religious hypocrisy, spiritual negligence, moral and ethical madness, and most of all there is pervasive unrest.**

So where can you go to find the Prince of Peace who Isaiah prophesied and the Angel of the Lord announced? The one who brings a never ending Kingdom—deliverance to God’s people and a light to the nations?

1. Where you can’t get peace.

- **From pleasure seeking.** But God has given us everything to enjoy for our pleasure.

But the relentless or secretive world of pleasure seeking is when a life is driven to pursue personal pleasure at all costs. And this can take many forms. Hedonism: The abandonment of any sense of morality in favor of remorseless profligacy, abandoning rationale and all reason to seek one’s own good.

- **So, being driven by the pursuit of pleasure** can bring temporary distraction. Provisional happiness that burns off when the pleasure abates. But it can’t bring your heart anything that is really lasting.
- **From work.** I would say the other end of that spectrum is workaholism. This is especially true among men of the west, and in particular American men. Seeking ultimate fulfillment in work and career at the expense of family, fellowship with God’s family, and the pursuit of ministry in the body of Christ.
 - **Over achieving can’t bring it. Workaholism** can bring you **temporary satisfaction.** A fleeting sense of accomplishment. But there is always another hill to take, another goal to hit—they never stop. But obsession with industry and accomplishment will forever remain elusive.

Illus. My friend is empty, hollow inside. Spent all for work. Rolling in cash, and no life to show for it. And certainly no time for his church or ministry.

Folks we were meant to work. God designed us for holy vocation. God sanctifies our jobs and careers and baptizes them into his Kingdom. You can get up every day and go to your job with the mindset that your work is redeemed and set apart for Christ’s Kingdom.

But if that work costs you your family, your friends, and your church. If that job becomes your new idol; the cult of career. It isn’t worth it. And it can’t bring you the peace you seek in it.

We can't get lasting peace from the pursuit of self, nor can we get it from the pursuit of satisfaction through work.

- **From religion.** Instead of wanton hedonism or dutiful workaholism, some turn to fastidious devotion to man-made religion. God has crowned every man and woman here with a religious nature, a heart designed to worship.
 - **Religion can bring us a sense of continuity with the past**—a kind of connection with all that came before us. Fastidious religion and devotion to the tedious could never bring you the thing that we lost in the Garden. The relationship with God our soul craves.

But mere religious devotion without a passionate relationship with God ultimately leaves us empty. Knowing we were designed for more. And we suspect it's not far out of reach. Jesus told the rabbi "You actually aren't very far from the kingdom of God." Meaning, you're moving in the right direction, **but you're not there yet because you still think of faith as a duty designed for the industrious parishioner.** And you think of church as "that place where we go." But forgetting that your faith is a living relationship with Christ in you—Christ our hope—Christ our peace.

And so religion which just merely sings the songs and goes through the motions and gives in the Shining star offering and goes home still empty, still restless in your bones. Because it can't really give you peace.

- **From circumstances.** Conditions change, and if we are waiting to experience peace through favorable conditions—than our peace will be fleeting.

Favorable Circumstances can bring temporary relief. Sometimes, for our sanity, we just need a break from the relentless winds that seem to be set against us. But relief is not lasting peace.

Illus. My gate being blown down. First time I fixed it, I left it until the wind stopped. On a fairly warm fall day with no wind, I went back out to fix it. This time I reinforced it a bit—and it was better than before.

Until the second wind storm. The morning of the second windstorm, there was little to no wind and I walked out of the gate, closed behind me, coffee in hand, very pleased with myself. I looked at all my hands had made and pronounced that it was good.

So we know what the problem is. A world full of unrest because it's full of people who aren't at peace. Who stress and strive and clamor for things that are dead ends, don't bring us peace.

2. Where we can find peace.

- **Peace with God.**

- **John 14:27** “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”
- **Col. 1:19-21** “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

We learn from the Garden narrative in Genesis that our sin and rebellion slaps the honor of God in the face.

We learn that our transgression is an act of revolt against his Sovereign rule and Word.

We discover that our sin is an affront to his holiness—bringing disruption to the order of creation which God had pronounced to be good.

And the effects of our sin—they are devastating. The world we live in is cursed beneath our feet and every drop of sweat that falls from our brow—as we till it, and responsibly develop it, is a reminder that something is not right. Creation, as we have said, is like a Rembrandt in all its perfection—now splotched with graffiti.

It is like Michelangelo’s statue of David, chiseled in perfection now marred and defaced.

Sin has brought disorder to creation where there once was order.

Sin has brought the damnation of death—but, Paul says in Colossians, God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the person of Jesus the Messiah—and through him, his blood shed on a cross—all creation is now reconciled to God. Peace is possible. And Jesus’ death and resurrection brings the panacea for really ails us. We are estranged from God. In exile until we are found in Christ.

But peace with God has certain lasting effects...namely...

- **Peace within.**

- **Phil. 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. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Now there is the possibility that we can experience a lasting calm for those raging storms within. The anxiety we face when circumstances seem like they are against us—it jars us out of the illusion of control.

In the world, Jesus said, you will have tribulation: (1) harassment by those who are hostile to the faith (2) the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous, stuff happens, (3) bodies born under the curse still break down and experience pain, sickness, disease, (4) jobs are gained and they are lost—But in the midst of all of this, what is the anchor of our souls? It is through prayer with thanksgiving for we make our request known to God. And as we practice the art of living in his presence, casting our cares upon him, being reminded that the world will be put right, and our bodies will raised

imperishable on the last day—a courage comes over us. A quiet, inexplicable calm comes over the storms that rage in us.

When we have peace through Christ's blood shed on a cross—when we trust in his resurrection from the dead—we can have a lasting incomprehensible peace that the world cannot know.

- **Peace with others**

- **Matt. 5:9** “Blessed are the **peacemakers**, for they shall be called sons of God.”
- **Eph. 2:14** “For he himself is our **peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.”

Since 3600 BC there have been 8000 recorded peace treaties among nations, and only roughly about 200 years of actual peace in human history. On our own, breathing the free air of forgiveness and reconciliation isn't impossible. We are damned to war and strife.

Illus. Katie Lambeau grew up hating her mother. All she remembered of her mom was an abusive, drunk, hateful woman. The smallest infraction or annoyance would bring terror into her life from her abusive mom. As she got older she encountered an even worse form of abuse: neglect.

They lost touch and in her mid 30's Katie found out that her mom had suffered several strokes that left her unable to speak or to take care of herself. She found out that her mom was all alone in an adult care center, and so she decided this would be the perfect opportunity for her to go and reconnect with her mom.

But something had changed in Katie that made her different and wanted to share it with her mother. So she visited her mom who was now this frail weakened woman, who was unable to communicate, accept through her eyes.

Katie shared her story of redemption in Christ, and somehow her mom's eyes just said, “I want more, please share more with me”. So she decided to come back and read the red letter words of Jesus every weekend.

And in the process of doing so her mom

**How delightful it is to see approaching over the mountains
the feet of a messenger who announces peace,
a messenger who brings good news, who announces deliverance,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” Is. 52:7**

We're no longer slaves to fear, we've been set free from our captivity to sin—and we are reconciled once again to God, peace within, peace with others.