

Text: John 20:19, Isaiah 9:6, John 14:27¹
Title: Peace Be With You
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Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

“Peace be with you.” John 20:19

“Peace” is one of the words we associate with Christmas and I want to think about “peace” with you this morning.

Several years ago, a Washington, D.C. TV reporter who was working on an assignment called “The Spirit of Christmas,” telephoned the British Embassy and asked to speak to the British ambassador.

“Ambassador,” the reporter said, “you have been very kind to us through the year and we would like to include you in a special Christmas news segment we’re going to run. Tell me, what would you like for Christmas?”

The ambassador replied, “I am very touched by your offer, but I must decline to accept any gift.”

“Oh, please,” said the reporter, “you really have been very helpful to us, so won’t you please tell me what you would especially like for Christmas?”

Again the ambassador refused, but the reporter persisted, and he finally gave in. “All right then, if you insist. This Christmas I would like a jar of mint jelly.”

Having forgotten about the conversation, the ambassador was surprised when several weeks later, on Christmas Eve, he turned on the evening news and heard the same reporter introducing a segment on “The Spirit of Christmas.”

The reporter began the piece with these words: “We recently interviewed three visiting ambassadors and asked them what they would like for Christmas. These three diplomats each gave revealing answer when they pondered what they would most like during this Christmas season of goodwill.

The German ambassador said: ‘I would like to see a peaceful and prosperous decade ahead for the newly liberated German people, and all citizens of the planet. May God bless us all during this historic period of change.’

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The Swiss ambassador wished: 'May the Spirit of Christmas last throughout the year. It is my dream that our world leaders will be guided toward a common goal of peaceful coexistence. This is my wish this Christmas season.'

And then we asked the British ambassador who said: 'I would like a jar of mint jelly.'" (© 2005 Sermon Central, contributed by Rich Grimes)

Mint jelly or world peace? Is there real hope for peace in our world, or should we just stick with the jams and jellies?

Earlier this year it seemed as if democratic change was going to sweep the Arab nations. The world was excited by the possibility of real change that would enhance freedom and tolerance in that region but the "Arab Spring" has not fulfilled its early promise and it seems that repression has again taken hold in Egypt and other Arab nations.

But there are some hopeful spots. Canadian soldiers are leaving Afghanistan and coming home. This week, the last American soldier left Iraq. But we know the peace is fragile. It seems that one of the constants of the human experience on this planet is that peace is fragile. The world constantly seems to be battling back and forth between peace and war.

One writer has written about the visible presence of these opposing forces in the City of Jerusalem. "Jerusalem" – the name means, "City of Peace." Writing in the Christmas Eve edition of The New Yorker magazine twenty years ago, Amos Elon wrote...

"Hardly a day passes in the 'holy city' without a riot or a stoning, without cars being torched or firebombs thrown, without attempted lynchings or the stabbing of an Israeli by a Palestinian (or vice versa). After each incident, municipal cleaning machines marked 'CITY OF PEACE' in three official languages, appear on the scene to wash blood from the streets in time for the next group of pious pilgrims to pass by, fingering their rosaries and muttering solemn prayers." (Amos Elon, writing in The New Yorker, Dec. 24, 1990)

The city of Jerusalem, the "City of Peace," has been central to God's work in the world for centuries and its name reminds us that God has plans for peace, not only for that city, but for the rest of the world as well.

A week from today we will be celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Later this week, during our Christmas Eve service on Saturday night, we're going to read the ancient words of the angels who announced Christ's birth with a stirring declaration of peace:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" Luke 2:14

They were announcing the birth of the one that Isaiah had prophetically named "the Prince of Peace."

Isaiah's prediction reads like this...

"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. 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." Isaiah 9:6-7

Jesus Christ is...

- 1) The **Wonderful Counselor** whose advice and guidance is always right and who never leads us astray.
- 2) The **Mighty God**, our hero who fights our battles and is never defeated.
- 3) The **Everlasting Father** who demonstrates what the Father is like and never fails us.

Today I want to focus on the last of these four titles. Jesus Christ is also the **Prince of Peace** who has peace at his command and will grant it to all those who request it of him. And we're going to see that His followers, those who call themselves "Christians," are to be people of peace more than any others in the world. The tragedy is that we so often fail to fulfill our potential!

We worship a God whose name is peace. In **Judges 6:24** we're told that Gideon built an altar to the Lord and called it YHWH Shalom, "**the LORD is Peace.**" In **Romans 15:33** Paul blesses the believers in Rome by saying: "**May the God of peace be with you all.**"

The Lord reveals his heart for his people when He instructs Aaron to bless them saying...

"The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." Numbers 6:24-26

God's peace is not something that we just keep within our own lives. It's not for "us four and no more." God's peace needs to be spread like oil on troubled waters. God's people with God's peace in their lives can be a tremendous force for peace in the world.

In northern India there has been bitter fighting between the two major groups, the Muslims and the Hindus. Hundreds of people have been killed over the last few years. But the churches of North India are growing in the middle of this battle.

Why? Francis Sunderaraj, the general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, says that Christian believers are known for an emphasis on peace and reconciliation and that this has greatly impressed the people around them and caused a growing interest in the Gospel.

Even in Northern Ireland God's people are bringing peace. The recent political peace initiative in Northern Ireland was preceded by years of "Peace protests" by courageous Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, who said, "enough of vengeance -- we are going to choose peace." In recent months there have been outbursts of the old violence and if the political peace is going to hold, there has to be a deeper work of peace in the hearts of the Irish people, like the peace made by Anna Moore and Bobby Corry.

Several years ago (1993), Anna and Bobby were married in a jail in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. What an odd wedding it was! It was so remarkable it was even reported in *The New York Times*.

You see, Anna Moore was a convicted IRA terrorist who had murdered 17 people with a bomb. Bobby Corry was a convicted Loyalist terrorist, also convicted of murder. The bride's maid, Susan Christie, was a convicted Ulster Defense Regiment soldier also convicted of murder. She had befriended Ms. Moore in prison despite their political and religious differences. What made the difference?

Well, Anna and Bobby got saved! They came to know the "Prince of Peace" who empowered them to leave behind the hatred and vengeance that had motivated their violence.

Before we can bring peace to the world, we need to have peace in our own hearts. Like Anna Moore and Bobby Corry, we need to solve the peace problem in our own hearts first, before we can be agents of peace in the world around us.

How can we be agents of peace on behalf of the Prince of Peace?

First, we need to begin by realizing that...

Peace is His gift -- we need to accept it.

Jesus said,

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." John 14:27

There is a common expression people sometimes use when death is near -- we need to "make our peace with God." Let me tell you something: we don't need to make our peace with God -- we simply need to surrender and receive His peace terms, because He has already declared peace with us!

Whether we knew it or not, before we came to Christ we were at war with Him. We rebelled against His authority, we broke His commands, we cursed His name and we rejected His offer of salvation. All of this rebellion deserved punishment, but God had already dealt with that problem even before we came to know about Jesus.

The same Old Testament prophet that foretold the coming of Jesus as the Prince of peace also told us that the **“the punishment that brought us peace was upon him” (Isaiah 53:5 NIV)**. When Jesus died on the cross, he bore our punishment for us. When we put our faith in Christ, the New Testament apostle Paul tells us, **“we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)**

When Christ appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, his first words to them were **“Peace be with you.” (John 20:19)** Three times in those early post-resurrection appearances he declared, “Peace be with you.” What Jesus was saying to them was this: “I’ve just completed the peacemaking process by dying on the cross and rising again -- peace is yours, take it!”

Jesus offers peace terms to us -- we simply need to accept them. God wants us to surrender to His terms.

Paul Stanley was an infantry commander in Vietnam, and he tells of a wounded Viet Cong soldier that he dealt with. The man was severely wounded and needed medical treatment, but his fear of his captors made him fight back every time they tried to approach him. Finally, Stanley took off his gun and moved slowly toward him, speaking gently as he went.

“He stared at me fearfully as I knelt down,” Stanley wrote, “but he allowed me to slide my arms under him and pick him up. As I walked with him toward a waiting helicopter, he began to cry and hold me tight. During our ride, our young captive sat on the floor, clinging to my leg. After landing, I picked him up and walked toward the medical tent. As we crossed the field, I felt the tenseness leave his body and his tight grasp loosen. His eyes softened, and his head leaned against my chest. The fear and resistance were gone -- he had finally surrendered.”

God wants to cleanse us from sin, heal us, care for us -- give us peace. God declares that the old crimes are gone -- our record is clean. The war is over. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

His peace is a gift -- we need to accept it.

Secondly, we need to understand that...

His peace is a guard -- we need to request it.

In Philippians 4 we find a prescription for peace:

“The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

Once we have accepted the gift of peace, we need to apply it regularly in our lives. God wants to care for us so when we become concerned about our lives, we simply need to turn to Him for help.

Whenever anything begins to upset our peace...

- ❖ worries about money, health, job, family, relationships,
- ❖ resentments about wrongs done to us,
- ❖ fears about things that we've done or left undone,
- ❖ Anything!

We can bring those concerns to God in prayer: **"And the peace of God ... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

Countless numbers of times, I have been awakened in the middle of the night by a worry, or I've had difficulty getting to sleep because of some concern -- I pray about it, committing it to the Lord who loves me and cares for me, and within minutes, I can feel the peace of God come over me and I drift off to sleep.

The word "guard" is a military term that paints a very real picture for us. When we commit things to the Lord, God sets up peace in our hearts and minds to "guard" them from worry and fear.

The key to peace of mind is trust in the One to whom we commit our problems. Isaiah tells us that God will look after our peace if we commit our lives to Him and put our trust in Him.

“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” Isaiah 26:3

We can be consumed with worry, or bitterness, or anger, just like those who don't have the gift of God's peace, unless we actively request the establishment of this guard on our hearts and minds. If we fail to bring anxieties to the Lord, then the guard remains unset. But if we simply request his peace in place of our worries, God places it there immediately.

Joanie Yoder called this "the Peace-of-Mind Game." Whenever she found that she was worrying about something, she played this game with herself. Instead of saying, "I'm worried," she stopped and said, "The Lord is my shepherd, so I'm worried to death!" The absurdity of the statement put her fears into perspective.

One friend of Yoder's used this little game to help her through an exam. As she began the exam, she was frozen with worry so she said, "The Lord is my shepherd, so I'm afraid I'll fail!" She suddenly felt the return of her peace of mind, took the exam and she passed.

His peace is a gift -- we have to accept it.
His peace is a guard -- we have to request it.

Thirdly, we need to recognize that...

His peace is a guide -- we must choose to follow it.

Disagreements over theology were dividing the first century church in the city of Colosse. Paul instructed the believers in that church with these words...

"let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body." Colossians 3:15

The word "rule" is taken from the world of athletics. It means to act as an umpire, the one who sets the rules and keeps things within the boundaries. The umpire governs the game.

A choice needed to be made. The members of that church had to choose to make the peace of Christ their goal. They had to decide to apply in their relationship with one another the same peace they had personally received from God.

As Christians, we can lose our peace of mind just like those who don't know the Prince of Peace, when we fail to request his peace as our guard.

And as Christians, sad to say, we can lose peace in the body of Christ just like those who don't know the Prince of Peace, when we fail to choose to follow peace as our guide.

Whether it's in our relationships within our families, our workplaces, our churches or our communities -- we must choose to make peace our rule.

Once we've come to know the Prince of Peace and accepted the gift of peace, once we've got the guard of peace set up in our hearts and minds then we can apply the rule of peace to our relationships.

Peter said that if we are to live in harmony with one another we must...

"seek peace and pursue it." 1 Peter 3:11

The Apostle Paul challenges us...

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:3 NIV

Sometimes the choice for peace is a very difficult one.

On Sunday, July 25, 1993 a group of terrorists burst into the worship service of St. James Church in Cape Town, South Africa. They sprayed the congregation with gunfire and grenades, killing 11 people and wounding 53. The people of the church could have responded in vengeance, but St. James Church was a church that had already made the choice to let the peace of Christ rule.

They were a mixed race church, well-known in the community for communicating Christ and for their social compassion. The church moved to express love and forgiveness for those who had murdered their family members. Phone calls and letters came from political leaders and secular organizations saying that the church’s attitude had given an enormous amount of hope to many in South Africa.

Many questioned how they could forgive. Frank Retief, the pastor of the church, said, “We weep. There’s a lot of sorrow. We’re angry at the senselessness of it all. But we’re more determined than ever to show as much of Christ as we can and to contribute toward reconciliation and a peaceful future.” It was that kind of spirit of peace that led to the eventual destruction of the apartheid system in South Africa.

God has made peace with us -- how can we withhold peace from others?

How can we be people of peace in our world?

First of all, realize that God’s peace is a gift -- accept it.

Have you accepted His offer of peace? -- receive the gift of peace the Prince wants to give you.

Second, understand that His peace is a guard -- request it.

Are you troubled? -- commit your turmoil to the Lord and receive his peace over your heart and mind.

Third, recognize that His peace is a guide – follow it.

Are your relationships troubled? -- determine to make peace your priority and pursue it.

One Sunday morning, a man woke up around 5 a.m., his wife and children still asleep. Glad to have time to himself, he went downstairs, brewed some coffee, and began to read the morning paper. Three sentences into an article, he saw his five-year-old daughter descending the stairs.

He said, "Honey, go back to bed." "But I'm not sleepy," she insisted.

Determined to read his paper, he again urged her to go back to bed. Again, she told him she was not tired.

Looking down at the newspaper, he conceived a plan. In the paper was a picture of the world, which he cut into several pieces. Handing his daughter some Scotch tape, he instructed her, "Go sit in the dining room, and see if you can put the world back together."

His daughter accepted the challenge, and he went back to the kitchen to finish his coffee and read the paper. After only a few sips of his coffee, though, his daughter came bounding into the kitchen. "Here, Daddy, I'm finished!" she said, showing him the picture of the world put back together.

Amazed, he asked, "Sweetie, how did you do that so fast?"

She replied, "It was easy, Daddy. On the back side of the page was a picture of a man. When you make the man right, you make the world right." (© 2005 PreachingToday.com Source unknown; submitted by Steve Ellis, Florence, Kentucky)

Only Jesus, the Prince of Peace, can make this world right.

“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.” Isaiah 9:6

- **Invitation to Prayer**
- **Final Song:** Joy to the World
- **Benediction**