

Title: The Peacemaker and Peacekeeper
Date: December 10, 2023
Subject: Peace
Scripture: Isaiah 9:6

230 feet is from the church front wall, the carport and then another church building added to it. That's the wingspan of the B36. It's length is 162 feet, about 3 times as wide as the sanctuary. About 47 feet high or 1 ½ times the height of the church roof. The B36 strategic bomber was capable of carrying 82,000 pounds of conventional or nuclear bombs. It was given the name Peacemaker.

Then there was the intercontinental ballistic missile. It could carry 10 nuclear warheads each 300 kilotons. A kiloton of TNT can be visualized as a cube about 27.8 feet on a side. 300 cubes would be 27.8 wide by 27.8 long stacked one on top of the other 8340 feet high. 231,852 cubic feet. It has a blast radius of 3.5 miles. The missile was called the Peacekeeper.

These were part of MAD – the policy of mutually assured destruction.

You may be thinking “Wow, pastor. That doesn't sound like a Christmas message, thinking about what people could inflict on one another.”

You're correct. I used them to contrast humanity's version of peacekeeping and peacemaking with God's method. People need to be assured, be very assured, the Lord God Almighty has the power and ability to destroy. He could immediately vaporize anybody who acts in a sinful manner which would show they were an enemy of God. Poof! Gone.

The Bible discloses that at the end of history God's wrath will be revealed leading to eternal destruction of all who reject him. There won't be an annihilation of people who will vanish from existence but they will have eternal conscious torment.

That still doesn't sound very Christmassy. I'm getting there.

The prospect of being eternally judged can be a motivator to help people seek God. It was for me as I didn't like the thought of what it would be like to be in hell forever.

The threat of destruction is an undercurrent of God's program. However, if that's all there was, people would see God as horribly brutal. They'd be repulsed by him and not want to have anything to do with him.

The Lord God Almighty's primary “weapon” for peacemaking and peacekeeping is something else. It's love.

Our first Scripture is an Old Testament prophecy which provides a foundation. Please turn to Isaiah 9. Read Isaiah 9: 6.

There's no doubt that these names point to Jesus as the one who was to come to be the Messiah, with the synonyms of the Christ, the Anointed One. There's much to explore in this magnificent foretelling of Christ but we'll limit ourselves to the last name - the Prince of Peace.

Prince of Peace points to his leadership of a kingdom. He is the one who will rule and reign. It will be a kingdom of peace. This is his overall mission.

The Bible Project video gave an in-depth description of peace. It's wholeness, soundness, well-being, completeness, health of soul, rest for the spirit. It's not only the absence of fighting and war against God because a relationship has been established. It's not primarily a feeling but includes a subjective peace of mind.

Isaiah has more to say about peace as he has a lot to say about the coming of Jesus and his ministry. A song of praise addresses God: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the rock eternal... Lord, you establish peace for us" (Isaiah 26:3, 4, 12). In the passage retelling Christ's crucifixion: "But he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him" (Isaiah 53:5).

Another prophet, Micah, gives the prophecy about Bethlehem being the place where he would be born. After that, the prophet shares a peaceful serene scene: "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be there peace" (Micah 5:4, 5).

The imagery from the Old Testament prophets of shepherds and sheep probably brings to mind images of Christ's birth as shepherds came to the manger. We don't know how many, or their ages or how bad they smelled, which is often what's typified of them because they spent so much time with the sheep that they smelled like them. We don't know if they nervously milled around or were talkative.

We do know, based on what the Bible tells us, that they responded to the angels' message: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14). They went to Bethlehem, found Mary, Joseph and the baby who was lying in a manger, and spread the word about what they had seen and heard. We envision them going back to the peaceful countryside sitting with sheep on the hills and being more at peace internally than they had ever been.

Cross references connect Isaiah to the story in Gospel of Luke. They also lead to the book of Romans. Please turn to Romans 5. Read Romans 5:1, 2.

We're not going to focus on hope or joy because hope was so last week and joy is next week. I say that facetiously. We can't completely separate the aspects of Advent because they're so intertwined. They're like a ball of Christmas lights we pull out of the bin and the strands are entangled in one another.

The stages of peace. Peace with God had a beginning so it's a good place to begin.

The initial stage of peace is when a spiritual life change comes over people. They become justified. Some people use the idea of God treating us just if I'd never sinned. The word justify is a legal term meaning to be declared not guilty. The crimes which the person had been accused of and had committed can no longer be held against them. It doesn't say the person was found innocent as if they had never committed anything wrong. There's an acknowledgement the person had done wrong yet the person is able to get away Scott free. The reason is someone else volunteered to pay the penalty for the accused.

There's a second aspect. The person is made right with the person who had been wronged.

God justifies. He takes a person who has sinned, committed moral crimes against him, and declares the person to be not guilty of any and all moral crimes. The sin and moral wrongdoing can't be held against the person. The punishment can't be enforced. In addition, God makes the person right with him by establishing a right relationship. The reason is someone else is volunteered to pay the penalty, the death penalty. Jesus Christ took upon himself the punishment we rightly deserved.

Now, how does this take place? Though Jesus died for all people and for all sins, the verdict of being justified doesn't automatically transfer to all people. The provision of God is unlimited in aspect but limited in effect. It's universally available but is restricted to those who enter a right relationship with God by placing their faith, their trust and confidence, in what the Lord Jesus Christ has done.

A little later in chapter 5 the idea of justification is revisited: Read Romans 5:6-9.

The Bible clearly says that the mechanism for people getting into a right relationship is God's demonstration of love which is Christ dying on the cross for us. The way that it becomes applicable is when people place their trust in what Christ has done.

When a person does that, God declares the person to be at peace with him. He no longer sees them as hostile, as enemies. The warring forces have been reconciled. The peace treaty has been completed and signed. God is friendly toward us. More than that, we are his friends. More than that, we are his children.

Our status of being at peace with God is echoed in other Scriptures. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus Christ), and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:19-22). "For he himself (Christ Jesus) is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (Ephesians 2:14, 17, 18).

Jesus is our peace as peace comes through him. Peace with God is available to all ethnic groups as Christ came for all peoples. He came to bring peace between people groups, to heal divisions. Isn't that something needed in our world today?

The second stage of peace. Peace is ongoing. It comes from the second part of the description of peace: wholeness, soundness, completeness, well-being, health of soul, rest for the spirit. It involves the spiritual, emotional, physical, psychological and social.

Peace was a common Hebrew greeting and way to say goodbye. Shalom. People could say it like we offhandedly say "hi, how are you?" or "bye."

Jesus had something much deeper in mind. Please turn to John 14. These words were given by Jesus during his last night on earth during the tumultuous evening when he revealed he was going to die.

Read John 14:27.

Trouble. Jesus had spoken about it earlier: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; Trust also in me” (John 14:1). Later he’d return to trouble: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33).

Jesus was being up front until the disciples and didn’t water down the truth. He didn’t tell them they might have a few slight difficulties or minor life fender benders. He told them they were going to face trouble with a capital T – all the way up to extreme difficulties and total repair jobs. They were going to have trouble...but they didn't have to be troubled. The same is true for us.

Into the diagnosis of having trouble, Jesus mixed in some juicy morsels – trust in God and the peace he gives. He declares his peace isn't like the temporary peace given by the world and can be blown apart by many troubles. Jesus tells us gives something that is deep and enduring.

Even as I spoke yesterday at Anita’s husband's celebration of life service that we don't have to grieve like those who don't have hope, we don't have to face trouble the way the world does. The trouble will still be there, but we’re to understand that God is there with us as well. We’re to trust him and rest in him. It's like putting our full weight on him and allowing him to carry us.

Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” It's based upon being at peace with God and having the trouble we had with God removed.

One of the troubles we face is being anxious and worrying. We get wound up into the stuff of life and go way beyond having a legitimate care and concern (Philippians 4:6 – 9). Instead of caving to anxiety, we’re to turn our focus to God, place our trust in him by praying and thinking about such things as whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy. Think the things of God. Place our focus there. The promise is the peace of God and the God of peace will be with us. His peace will serve as a guard for our hearts and our minds. The ball of tangled Christmas returns as there’s a connection to joy. Just prior to the teaching on not being anxious we're told to “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!” (4:4).

This isn't just getting rid of the noise of life. If we wanted to do that, we could go to Minnesota. Well, not just any old place in Minnesota, but the Orfield Laboratories. They conduct research on product design as it relates to lighting, heating, air quality, sound, architecture and things related to our senses.

They have an anechoic chamber. It’s been recognized by Guinness Records as the quietest place on earth. The room was constructed with a double wall of insulated steel and foot-thick concrete. The walls, floor and ceiling are lined with deep, fiberglass wedges which make it 99.99% sound absorbent. A quiet bedroom’s background noise measures at 30 decibels. The anechoic chamber registers -9.4 decibels. They have The Orfield Challenge. People see how much time the can spend in the room -- alone, in the dark, in true acoustical silence. No talking, singing, humming. The only sounds would be the beating of own heart, lungs breathing in and out

and growling of stomach. The challenge is to break the current record of 3 hours. The cost is \$600 per hour or part thereof and is non-refundable. Most people can only handle a few minutes before they freak out.

God desires to give peace in the middle of the noise, difficulty and trouble.

Initial peace and ongoing peace will eventually lead to eternal peace. Read Roman 16:20.

This echoes, reiterates and confirms the promise of victory that was given after Adam and Eve sinned. The Lord told the guilty pair that the devil would inflict some pain on their offspring, Jesus, but the Savior would ultimately and decisively gain the victory by crushing the devil.

When Jesus spoke with the disciples about the trouble they would face, he gave them this assurance: “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Jesus hadn’t yet gone to the cross. He hadn’t yet died. He hadn’t yet risen from the grave. He hadn’t yet ascended to the Father. But he declared the victory was already an accomplished fact - no ifs, ands or buts. There would be and could be no outcome other than him being victorious over the devil.

Christ’s death was 2000 years ago and we’re waiting to see the full impact of what Christ’s victory brings. We’ve seen it in that we’ve been able to come to know Christ as our Savior. Jesus triumphed over the devil's grip he had on us as sinners and enemies of God. He works through us now to help us live in a victorious manner. But there’s more yet to come. There's the ultimate victory when the devil and the hordes of evil will be forever vanquished and cast into the eternal lake of fire.

As Martin Luther wrote in his epic song A Mighty Fortress is Our God: “The Prince of darkness grim- we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him.” That word is Jesus, the name that is above every name and at which every knee shall bow and confess he is Lord.

The timing of the ultimate victory is yet future when God wraps up everything in a nice bow.

In the meantime, the prayer is that God's grace would be with us.

Rudolf Bosshardt, Arnolis Hayman were captured by the Chinese Communist army on October 1, 1934. Hayman was released after 413 days. Bosshardt endured 560 days of captivity. He returned to Europe to recover before resuming missionary work and serving for over 40 years in China and Laos.

During their captivity the men were commanded to sing at a party held by the Communist leaders. They only knew hymns but permission to sing was reluctantly given. Bosshardt had memorized 500 hymns which came in handy when the few books they had were confiscated and they had to rely on their memory of Scripture and those hymns. Prisoners asked about their beliefs and the source of their peace of mind.

Bosshardt endured beatings and sicknesses: malaria, pleurisy, bronchitis, beri-beri. Sometimes he was so sick he was allowed to ride a horse or was carried.

The pair weren’t allowed to speak by the guards. Bosshardt kept track of the days and on one of the Christmas Days they were together, he wanted to share the good news with Hayman. He slowly twisted a piece of straw into the letter I, another into an M, then M – A – N – U – E – L to spell out ‘Immanuel’. Even in the bleakest of circumstances they were able to have peace from the knowledge God was with them through Jesus.