

Prince of Peace
Isaiah 9:6
December 19, 2012
Advent Mid-Week 4

Psalm 37:1-11 *Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.*

Grace, mercy, and peace from the Prince of Peace, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Two painters were commissioned by the king to paint the picture of perfect peace. One painter painted a picture of a placid lake surrounded by tall pines with beautiful, snow-capped mountains in the background.

The other painter painted a picture of a roaring waterfall. At the base of the waterfall, the water churned and seethed. Precariously hanging over this raging tumult was a small birch tree. At the top of that tree, directly above the base of the waterfall, was a small nest. In that nest was a mother robin sitting on her eggs.

Which painting do you think the king chose? I'll tell the answer later.

This is the last of our Advent mid-week services in which we've been looking at Isaiah's description of our Savior. Isaiah writes: *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.* Tonight we will look at Jesus as the Prince of Peace.

In order to understand this title, we must, once again, look at the words separately. In Isaiah's day, the title of prince belonged to more than just the heir to the throne. A prince of Isaiah's time was someone who was the exclusive owner of something. The commander of an army was the prince of the army. The head of a family was the prince of the family.

So, when Isaiah calls Jesus the Prince of Peace, he's saying that Jesus is the exclusive owner of peace. That means the only way we can have peace is if it comes from the one who owns all peace. Consequently, we might have to change the way we think about peace. We need to understand that:

- ! Peace doesn't come in the form of a husband or wife.
- ! Peace doesn't come as a result of owning things.
- ! Peace is not the property of governments or treaties.
- ! Peace is not found in drugs, gambling, hobbies, or sex.

Giving Jesus the title, Prince of Peace, means that peace belongs exclusively to the baby in the manger. Whatever else the world might call peace is just a thin imitation. If you look for peace anywhere other than in Bethlehem, you're going to find an artificial place.

Bethlehem is where you find peace, but what exactly is peace. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. The Hebrew intention for shalom is "the binding together of fragments into a meaningful whole." We receive the perfect peace of Jesus when we allow Jesus to bind together the fragments of our lives into a perfect wholeness in him.

Isn't that a wonderful thought? How wonderful to think about Jesus gathering all the disjointed pieces of our lives and forming them into a perfectly balanced picture of peace. But how does that happen? Is there something we do to make that a reality? To answer that question we turn to Psalm 37. There we find the answer: *But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace* (Ps 37:11 NIV). If peace comes from being meek, we'd better get a good handle on what it means to be meek.

There's a difference between what we call meek and what the Bible calls meek. The Bible's meek is someone who is the picture of power under control. We might say a tamed horse is meek – he possesses controlled strength.

The meekness of Psalm 37 means to be entirely dependent on God. Furthermore, we need to realize that all our efforts will never make us entirely dependent on God. We can wish, and hope, and work, and concentrate but we will never succeed in forcing ourselves to be dependent on God. That's because our sinful human nature resists admitting we need to be dependent on anyone.

In our sinfulness, we have a natural desire to be God. We want to control everything. We don't want anything to do with dependence. That, of course, is impossible but that doesn't stop us from trying. That means for us to have the meekness that *will bring great peace* we must change our basic human nature.

Changing one's basic nature is the biggest job a person can ever undertake. It's also something that can't be done our way. It must be done God's way. God gave us five instructions for changing our nature from arrogance to meekness in Psalm 37. These five directives open us to the peace which only the Prince of Peace possesses.

Psalm 37:3 gives us our first change. There the psalmist instructs us to *Trust in the Lord*.

You may know the story about the little boy standing in a cloud of smoke at a window on the second floor of his burning house. His father is outside the house standing below the boy. The father calls out, "Jump, son, and I'll catch you." The lad answers, "But, daddy, I can't see you." "I know," his father says, "but I can see you."

That's what trusting God is all about. Putting our complete trust in God means that we firmly believe that God can and does see us even when we can't see him. Having complete trust in God means never having to worry. We don't fret about the world falling apart around us because we know that if it does God will catch us. A person who lives without worry is a person who lives in peace.

Our next change comes from Psalm 37:4 – *Delight yourself in the Lord*. The word delight, as it is used here, means to become like wax – pliable, moldable. A person who is pliable and not rigid is a person who is teachable – a person who can use new information to build himself up.

If change in our nature is to happen, we must be willing to let God mold and shape us like a soft piece of wax. We must open ourselves to the change that can come about when we read and study his Word. Which means, Bible study doesn't stop at confirmation. When God tells us to *delight yourself in the Lord*, he is saying, be teachable over the long haul. Be teachable when you're 23, when you're 93, and everywhere in between. We must never stop learning from and learning about God.

The third change is in verse 5 of the psalm. *Commit your way to the Lord*. The Hebrew word we translate as commit literally means to roll. When you roll a bowling ball down the alley, the ball has no control over where it's going. It simply follows the forces which sent it down the lane. The spin, the speed, the aim, gravity, inertia, and other laws of physics have control over the ball's destination. The ball has only one job – to roll.

When we commit our lives to God, we are saying, "I'm not going to let my life be controlled by my fears, my preconceived notions of how the future should look, my selfish ambitions, my ideas of what fairness is." Instead, I'm turning my life over to God's control. We can do this because God has always shown himself to be trustworthy and God loves us unconditionally. God loves us enough to die for us.

Change number four is the very difficult instruction in verse 7. *Be still before the Lord*. To be still means to shut your mouth, stop all activity, and listen. One of the main reasons Christians lack peace in their lives is because they don't take the time to be still before the Lord.

Being still in this day and age is not easy. We have TV, radio, work, hobbies, sports, smart phones, and computers; all of which work to keep us anything but still. Being still before the Lord is a primary requirement for having the peace of God in our lives. We must daily take time to pray, to meditate on God and his love for us, and then be still. Sit quietly and let God's peace and presence fill every part of your being. Be still before the Lord.

The last change to our nature is something which may not make sense at first. Verse 8 of Psalm 37 tells us to *refrain from anger*. Our concern here isn't your anger as much as it is what makes you angry. Anger is nothing more than your reaction to having your goals blocked. You get angry when you don't get what you want. It's as human as something can get. The problem is you're trying to fulfill your goals.

You see, if you are truly trusting in, delighting in, committing to, and listening to God, whose goals will be the goals of your life? God's, of course. If God's goals are blocked, whose problem is it? God's problem, not yours. But I can guarantee you that no goal of God's will ever be blocked.

My point is this, if you find that the goals of your life are being stifled, and if that makes you angry, there's good reason to be doing an inventory of your meekness. You should stop and ask yourself, "Am I truly trusting, am I delighting, am I committing, am I listening?" Anger is the litmus test of meekness.

I promised to tell you which painting the king chose. He chose the painting of the waterfall. When someone asked why, he said, "The painting of the lake was only stagnation, but the painting of the waterfall was true peace in the face of danger."

My friends, the Prince of Peace came to Bethlehem to bring you a peace that passes all understanding. He is the only one who can give you that peace because he is the exclusive owner of peace. He came to take all the fragments of your life and mold them into a beautiful work of art. He has even given us detailed instructions in Psalm 37 to show us how to rid ourselves of ourselves and be open to the Prince of Peace.

One last thought on the peace of Christ. Don't ever confuse the gift of the Prince of Peace with tranquility. The peace which Jesus brings is sometimes, like the painting, peace in the face of danger and unrest. Remember, when the Prince of Peace comes, sometimes he calms the storm and other times he calms his child.