

The Prince of Peace

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[0:00] You know, in less than a week, we will gather with our families to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Prince of Peace.

! And I find it comforting that God the Spirit has, in His sovereignty, brought us to a passage on the peace of Christ that was made possible by His entrance into the world as the unique God-man which we are celebrating.

The Creator God has made all things. He made the galaxies and the atoms. He made toads and lions, angels and men.

And these last two groups or orders of beings are quite interesting. Though created by a special act of the living God, both angels and humans have suffered defeat and rebellion and war and death and separation from God.

Millions and perhaps more than that of angels fell into sin. And so has every member of the human family since Adam.

[1:36] At least one-third of the angelic hosts fell in what we know as Lucifer's rebellion. And you will remember that Lucifer was the exalted angel of heaven.

He was the highest created being in the universe. And the operative words here are created being. I'm amazed when I say that how many Christian people rebel at that point and say that the distinction of being the highest created being belongs to Jesus.

And of course they couldn't be more wrong. Jesus is not a created being. Jesus is the eternal God, co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Spirit.

Jesus created Lucifer. Not the other way around. One day Lucifer decided that he would exalt himself higher than the Most High God.

[2:50] He was going to place his throne above that of El Shaddai, which means the Almighty God. That of course was unacceptable and Lucifer came crashing down.

He was cast out of heaven. But millions and perhaps more, even in the billions, of angelic beings had thrown in with Lucifer.

That's always a surprise. And they had followed Lucifer in the rebellion. They too were cast out. Lucifer got a new name out of all this called Satan.

The angels got a new name of fallen angels or demons. And we talk about them. And they populate the earth in our day.

They were cast down. And unfortunately, the planet that God chose on which to cast them down is none other than planet earth where they carried on their evil ministry to this very day.

[4:04] When all of this happened, though, the peace of heaven was shattered. In fact, the Bible has a description for all of this. And it is astonishing to me, and I'm sure it's astonishing to you, because the Bible says, and there was war in heaven.

And that's just hard to get your arms around. A war broke out in heaven. And obviously, it was not a war like we're used to.

But this was an unimaginable event to human beings. We cannot comprehend that a war broke out in heaven.

I looked it up. What is war? War is the absence of peace. Pretty plain. I don't know that there is a better definition than that. It is a state where peace no longer reigns or controls.

Well, armed with that knowledge, what about the members of the human family? Do we have peace? God, as we know, specially created the human race.

[5:21] He made man from the dust of the earth, and He put him in a place called the Garden of Eden. From man's flesh and bone, God fashioned a woman, placed her with the man in the same garden, Adam, our first parent, father of the human race, Adam was given a number of positive

commands.

God said, you are to till the garden. He would have control over the animals, even naming them. He would work with his wife to populate the earth, and so on.

And among all these, and there's a lot more, but among all those very positive commands, they were given one negative instruction, and that is, they were to abstain from eating of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And it reminds me of when you're growing up on a farm, and your mom says, don't go down by the creek, there's a huge wasp nest down there.

Well, where's that little boy going to go? And he'll be back shortly, with a bunch of welts, you know, crying, and Bob will have to deal with it. Because when God said, don't eat of the fruit, that is precisely what we did.

[6:55] Precisely what the human race did. They ate the forbidden fruit. And with that single act of disobedience, everything changed.

Everything. I have often said, and I will say again, that humans, Christians, and even our most learned theologians, have never fully plumbed the depths of the fall that occurred in the Garden of Eden.

We're probably not capable of doing that. When sin was introduced into the human race, everything changed. And we saw that immediately, didn't we?

I mean, what's the first thing that they did? They went and hid from God. I've said before, where do you go? To hide from God. Jonah couldn't do it. He went down to the roots of the mountains in the sea, in the ocean.

And they said God was there. We didn't know when that was written that mountains were in the ocean. We discovered mountains in the ocean 300 years ago. Everything changed.

[8:06] The decision of Adam to disobey God initiated a war that has raged for millennia.

This war has been cosmic in scope, and we can never humanly calculate the number of casualties. Both human and angelic.

Beyond our ability, even with computers, to calculate. Men and women are in hell today and will remain there for eternity because of the sin that entered the human race.

disobedience kindled the wrath of God to an unimaginable level. I was recently listening to what I consider one of the great theologians of our time, Dr. R.C. Sproul.

I had lunch with R.C. Sproul Jr. last year, and that was interesting. And I told him, I said, I know your nickname, but I'm not going to tell it. He said, thank you. His older sister, when he was a little boy, named him Precious.

[9:17] And to this day, the family, you know, on Christmas when they gather, we'll call him Precious. Dr. Sproul Sr. was speaking at the Christian Book Publishers Convention.

There were thousands in attendance. His topic that day was our common salvation. And Dr. Sproul asked a question to that audience.

I suppose we could even ask it here tonight. I think I know the answer, but we could ask it. But Dr. Sproul, around all these thousands of people, said, are you saved?

Real simple, three words. Kind of intimidating. You know, I'm sure there were people that were offended. Are you saved? And I would guess, of course, that everyone in here would answer in the affirmative.

Why would you want to hang around and listen to me if you weren't? The majority members of our church, I believe, would affirm that they are in a saving relationship with the Lord.

[10:21] And I think it's true. Perhaps there is someone that would say yes, but to avoid embarrassment, deep down, they have some nagging questions as to whether or not that is true.

If you've ever doubted your salvation, congratulations, so 99.999% of everybody that's ever been saved, I'm always saying, Lord, how could I have done that and be a saved man?

And if the Lord ever answers me, he says, I don't know. How could you? I'm going to be really bad. It used to be rather common for Southern Baptists to ask people if they were saved.

In fact, that word saved, and I won't develop that tonight, but I'm writing a message if I ever have to deliver one on the term saved because that was very common from Augustine forward.

And then it started changing and we softened a little bit. Have you been converted? Are you committed? And some things like that. And so Dr. Sproul said, are you saved?

[11:28] And he said, many of you have probably been asked that question, but there's a next logical question that we never ask. I dare say probably few if any of us in here have ever heard this asked.

And this probably ought to be in the tracks we hand out. And if a person were to say to Dr. Sproul or any of us, say, oh yeah, I'm saved. Then ask them this.

Saved from what? Wow. You ever thought of that? Has anyone ever asked you that? You've been saved. That's good. Saved. What were you saved from?

Dr. Sproul asked the audience of several thousand that question and they froze. I can just picture they were probably all going, don't call on me, whatever you do.

They froze. They were helpless to answer. And it was obvious that many in the audience had never heard such a question, much less considered it.

[12:36] Most people claiming a relationship with God through Christ have not even considered it. What is it then that we've been saved from?

And the majority of people claiming to be a Christian would probably answer, I've been saved from hell, I've been saved from Satan, and that's, you know, I understand that answer, but in the ultimate sense, what have we been saved from?

Because ultimately, we have been saved from the wrath of God. That's what we've been saved from. One of the greatest preachers that I've heard in my lifetime, recently, a young guy, Paul Worsher, he went to a church for a seven-day revival, and he started with that message.

We've been saved, if you're saved in here, you've been saved from the wrath of God. And he preached on that, started on a Saturday night, we're going to go Sunday, Monday to him, and the pastor got him after the service and said, what did you say?

We were saved from what? Paul said, we're saved from the wrath of God. And he said, did you believe that? He said, yeah. He said, well, we won't need you the rest of the week.

[14:08] You can go home. And he left. People are sensitive about that. War erupted between God and the human family in the Garden of Eden, and it has been raging ever since.

I see it every day at the police department because I read what's happened the last 24 hours. The horrible things we see, the things we hear, are really a product of that war.

They're a product of the war. And the things included in that war, in the extreme, are murder.

Russian ambassador Turkey was murdered in the last 24 hours.

That's got some implications, I think. Murder, strife, abortion, rampant homosexuality, unfaithfulness, the rejection of God, the rejection of Christ, the rejection of His Word, to name a few. Now there's a peace treaty, and it's called the cross. The cross of Christ is the only peace treaty that exists between a holy and offended God on the one hand, and a rebellious, death-deserving humanity on the other.

[15:40] Because of what Christ accomplished on the cross, on our behalf, He didn't need it for Himself, did He? On our behalf, we can have peace in the midst of turmoil and war.

and all of this leads, by the way, to our focal passage this evening. I told Mr. Lee we're only going to cover one passage tonight.

I failed to say, but it's got four parts. But we're only going to cover one verse of Scripture today, but it's quite a verse. Listen to this. Peace I leave with you.

My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

John 14:27 You know, if we were stranded on a desert island for the next ten years and had only this verse of Scripture to study, I think it would be a good one.

[16:48] There's a lot of parts to this. Ten years may not be sufficient time to fully study the great truths that it contains.

When we read of peace in the inspired text of the New Testament, we have to think in terms of our standing before God.

The foundation stone is our peace with God. That's the structure on which we're going to build.

There's a foundation. And the foundation stone is our peace with God.

That is the base. That's the starting point. If peace with God has been achieved, there is nothing that should interfere with our peace in daily living.

Unless we let it. That's probably what we usually do. Unsafe people do not know and cannot comprehend such a level of peace as this.

[17:58] Such pieces as this must be understood only in the context of the sovereignty of God working through the indwelling spirit of God in the life of the true believer who has embraced Christ as Redeemer and been embraced by Him.

You know, I've seen a lot of Christian tracks in my time of do you know God? Do you know Christ? Do you know the Lord? I want to write one that says does the Lord know you?

Does the Lord know me? Jesus looked at unsleepiness and said I never knew you. Maybe the perfect question is does He know us? The good news of the gospel is that those who were previously in rebellion against God can now be at peace with God.

We were once enemies estranged from God and far from Him and now we can have the peace of a relationship with God through and only through the finished work of Christ on the cross.

And I've had a lot of people over the years say to me but you don't know what I've done. And I've got a couple answers for that. No, I don't. And I don't want to know. I don't know what I've done but I also know what Christ has done.

[19:28] One of the reformers or puritans back 200 years ago said, I'm a great sinner but Christ is a greater Savior. So I do know, I may not know what you've done, I don't want to know what you've done, but I do know what I have done and I know what Christ has done and therefore we can have peace in a relationship with God through the finished work of Christ.

Paul in his writings over and over and over said grace and peace be unto you, grace and peace. And let me tell you, you can't have peace without grace.

They're linked. Grace and peace. It's interesting, he says that in 13 of his books. He didn't say that in Hebrews. I wish Don was here. I was going to bring that up. but Paul said to those who have been justified by God that they are now at peace with God.

The reconciling agent to the living God is the death of his son. Nothing need be added to that. Nothing can be added to that. It's Christ plus nothing.

Our Roman Catholic friends don't buy that. Christ plus, you know, good works, Christ plus the Roman church, Christ plus, the sacraments. What happens when we are truly saved?

[20:56] At the moment God justifies us, the moment of salvation we are justified. People say, well, I've heard that mean just as if we've never sinned. I'm not going to argue against that, but it goes beyond that.

It is just as if you are Jesus to the Father. That's how intimate our relationship comes to Him. and when we are justified by God, we are now at peace with God.

The reconciling agent to the living God is the death of His Son. What happens when we're truly saved? He justifies us. His treatment of us parallels His treatment of His Son, His child, and we too become the children of God.

the rebellion ends in our hearts. It's over. Sin is forgiven. And we who are enemies and far off become sons and are drawn near to Him.

The Bible even says that our minds which were previously set on death are now set on life. That's called the gospel of peace, the good news of peace.

[22:16] And there's something amazing about all this. God can do all that without violating His perfect standard of righteousness.

He can do all that. In fact, righteousness and peace are linked in Scripture. In Psalm 85.10, I'll read to you, loving kindness and truth have met together.

And I love this. Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Boy, I like that. The peace the true believer experiences is not so much peace with God as it is the peace of God.

It's what He gives us. And Jesus said, My peace I give to you. God is the source of peace.

Therefore, He can bestow peace upon His elect children.

The writers of the New Testament repeatedly started their books with grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23:29] And those, don't pass over those. Those are not just so many words with which to start a book. So many times we seem to pass over those opening verses. we want to get to the meat.

It's all meat. It's all meat. And those very words capture the sense of our reconciliation with the triune God.

You're not going to read this in Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, New Age.

You're not going to read that. You're not even going to read it in Judaism with the Old Testament as the standard.

You're not going to read it. Christ refers to this as my peace, his peace. It was the same peace he demonstrated throughout his passion as he stood before the Jewish world and the Roman world. And this peace is different from that which the world gives. The Bible says, not as the world gives peace do I give to you.

[24 : 39] It's not a peace like the world gives. And Jesus in that verse, portion of that verse, is making a contrast.

There is his peace and there is the world's peace. And they are two different types of peace. In truth, there is no true peace offered by the world.

voice of masonry. How many trillions of dollars have we spent to bring peace to the Middle East? It will only happen when the Prince of Peace returns.

It's not going to happen. Save your money. Those in the world, see the problem with the world is they don't realize they're at war with God. They don't realize it.

Any peace the world offers is a false peace promise based upon false hope, false promises and ignorance. Absolute ignorance.

[25 : 40] And the single thing the world is most ignorant about is the wrath of God. People don't buy into that. You know what the prevailing view of heaven is?

How do you get to heaven? You know what the world says? You die. Dr. Sproul again called it justification by death. Somebody dies, he goes to heaven.

I remember Charles Stanley telling a story many years ago when this woman came to him. She'd been a faithful member. Husband is lost as a goose in June. And she came to him over and over and over.

My husband's lost. He's going to die and go to hell. Would you come talk to him? Dr. Stanley go talk to him. I don't anything to do with that. Church is full of hypocrites. Dr. Stanley said, well, there's room for one more.

I don't want anything to do with it. Not interesting. The man dies. The widow calls. He goes to see her. Family's gathered. He said, Dr. Stanley, we'd like you to do the funeral.

[26 : 43] And he said, you know, my husband's in heaven. And Dr. Stanley said, well, I'm glad to hear that. Tell me about that. He said, well, he was a good husband. Good to me.

Good to the kids. Kept food on our table. He kept the lawn mowed. And said, the good man, God never lets a good man go to hell.

Folks, there's been thousands of good men go to hell since we started this message tonight. All over the world. Good people. people. I always think of Dr.

Salk, who invented the polio vaccine and died an agnostic Jew, didn't even believe. Saved a billion children from polio.

That was the big thing. Michael, did you get the tail end of that? Yeah, that was huge. The iron lung. Kids in an iron lung. And Dr. Salk, but Dr.

[27 : 41] Salk died an unbeliever. Well, something happened that we don't know that. Jonathan Edwards, America's most brilliant theologian and pastor, understood this.

In his greatest sermon, I personally think the greatest sermon ever preached on American soil, centers in the hands of an angry God. Edwards wrote that every lost person is like a spider hang above the eternal flames of hell.

There they hang by the slightest thread and all God has to do is merely move his fingers like that. And the thread will be snapped and the center will plunge headlong into those eternal flames of hell forever.

It's that easy for God. And they're gone. God's wrath, according to Scripture, can be kindled in a moment. The only thing that restrains God at this very moment from pouring out wrath upon the lost is grace and mercy to an undeserving world.

Grace and mercy. And he's the great bestower of grace and mercy to every human. How do I know that? Because everybody's breathing, everybody's enjoying moisture, rain, snow, replenish the earth, crops grow, they have oxygen to breathe, gravity holds us down.

[29 : 16] There's all kinds of general grace. Specific grace is reserved for his church. The world's peace is inadequate. It will not stand the test of time, and it certainly will not last for eternity.

Only those who know Christ can know the abiding peace of God. Every other form of peace is an illusion. And then Jesus next gives the disciples some assurance.

He says this, do not let your hearts be troubled, nor let your hearts be fearful. And let me say to you, whenever you read, don't let your hearts be troubled, they were troubled.

You can mark it down, they were troubled. When the Bible says, don't be afraid, they were afraid.

That's why they said it. That's why the writers said it, by inspiration.

When Jesus said that, you can be assured of two things. They were troubled, and they were fearful.

And of course, think back to what they'd been going through. We already studied that in chapter 13.

[30:29] And now in 14, Jesus says, I'm going away. And I'm going to die on a cross. Death on a cross. it was incumbent upon the disciples to appropriate the peace of Christ.

That's not changed in our day. Peace is not breathed in like so much oxygen. Christ gives the promise, but we are to appropriate the promise.

It is no different with the commands God gives His people. He gives them, we're supposed to obey them. in the New Testament, people that do such things have counted and they've come up with something like 638 commands in the New Testament that we are instructed to obey.

I wonder if we can name 100 or 50 or 25 or 10 or 3 or 4. When it comes to the promise of God's peace, we are commanded to appropriate it.

So how do we do that? By trusting. That's a powerful word in the Greek language. Pistuo. By trusting in the goodness, faithfulness, and provision that God has given to and for His children.

[31:52] When we do that, He fills us with joy and peace. We're even told to be anxious for nothing. We are told to forget the past and press on toward the call of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul wrote that. I think often of the Baptist missionary in another century who was going on the mission field to Africa.

Darkest Africa. Now, in those days when you were called to missions, missions, you boarded a sailing ship, and you journeyed for weeks or months, and you didn't get a furlough every three years.

You didn't get a telegram in darkest Africa that your daddy or mom is sick, one of your parents have died, you need to come home and attend the funeral.

That didn't happen. When you parted with your family, you were parting them for this life. Some of the great missionaries, I've got books about the great missionaries, they had this sense they were going for life.

[33:13] Well, this young missionary was boarding a ship destined for Africa. He was about 20 years old. His pastor, who was about double that, handed him a sealed letter.

And he said, if you ever lose the peace of Christ when you're doing battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil on the mission field, he said, I want you to open this letter and read it and study its contents.

So if you ever get to that point, this is your fire extinguisher, your emergency hatch, open this letter and read it. Forty years go by.

The missionary, now 60, returns home. He is met by the aged pastor. He's still alive, who had sent him off. He's 80 years old now.

And he walks down the gang plank, and the pastor takes out this unopened letter, yellowed with time, still sealed in the original envelope, hands it to the pastor, and the missionary says, I never lost the peace of Christ.

[34:35] Never had to open it. I've probably had it open when we got about two miles out of harbor. May each of us, this Christmas season, as we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, be able to say with that missionary, I never lost the peace of Christ.

What a testimony. And I will close and say to all of you, Merry Christmas, to you and your family, and Mike Dursham, voice a word of prayer for us.