

“Our Peace Rests on Him Alone” – Pr Jim Sprengle Advent Midweek 3 – December 20, 2023

- I. **Isaiah 9:1-7** – Previously read
- II. **By now, I hope you have your plans for Christmas set up.**
 - a. With only five days to Christmas, it’s so close that you don’t have much wiggle room.
 - i. Who is coming to the house for Christmas?
 - ii. When are they arriving?
 - iii. Do you have to make a run to the airport to pick up travelers?
 - iv. Is the spare bedroom ready, or is it full of dust bunnies?
 - v. What will the meal include?
 1. How will your vegan niece react when you set a giant Christmas ham in front of her?
 2. What about grandpa who’s trying to eat low fat for his heart?
 - vi. What about the different personalities sitting at the table?
 1. Remember what happened last year when Aunt Hilda sat next to little Tommy and he wiped his hands off on her Christmas dress?
 - vii. Just, think, you have ten dishes that have to be prepared and hot, all at the same time!
 - b. Yes, Christmas requires planning and control.
 - i. It’s sort of like being a ringmaster for a 3-ring circus...
 - ii. If only we can orchestrate everything to come together perfectly... all the people, the food, and location... maybe we can have peace.
 - iii. As long as everyone does what they are supposed to, the oven works properly, and the airlines don’t have any delays...we can have peace.
 - c. Control is the theme of our peace today / tonight.
 - i. We’ve been looking for peace over the last few weeks, and how hard it is to find in the world.
 - ii. The first point of the star was finding peace through possessions and more stuff...
 1. If only we could have everything we ever dreamed of, we would have a sense of peace.
 2. However, God stops us short of drifting off and puts our focus on the baby born in humble surroundings... as He lays in the manger, we have all that we truly need.
 - iii. Last week we looked for peace from distance – if only we could distance ourselves by getting away from it all to the perfect retreat... or if we could only distance ourselves from the past... then we could have real peace.
 1. But once again, God stops us short of going too far in either direction, and gives us peace in the present.

- 2. Our peace is not some distant retreat but in this very moment... and God's peace is present even when the storm is still here.
- d. So, now we have the last two points ... the bottom points that are kind of like two legs that hold the star up.
 - i. As long as we manage all that weight and take control, especially that our plans and designs work out... then we have peace.

III. **Believing we can control things is an illusion.**

- a. Sure, we have some ability to put a schedule together, or plan some things out... but we can never control the outcome.
- b. The outcome is always giving us trouble – because we never know if a problem will arise, or any number of issues that change the results of all our careful planning and preparation.
- c. The false belief that controlling things brings us peace can actually put us in a state of bondage – a state of believing we can orchestrate and manage life so that everything works out the way we think is right.
 - i. Many times, we even get God in on this idea... as we tell ourselves that God only wants peace for me and my family, so He will make everything ok... at least for Christmas Day!
 - ii. And yes, the truth is that God does want peace, as we read in Hebrews 12:14 – “Strive for peace with everyone,” and Romans 12:18 says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”
 - iii. So, is it possible to control the outcome of our gatherings, of our meals, of the relationships with those around us?
 - 1. No, we can only control ourselves... and when we try to control everything and everyone around us... it's like the two points at the bottom of a star... we are holding up an impossible weight.
- d. In reality, being in control almost always stems from an anxious heart.
 - i. We feel out of control when things are up in the air, or people don't act the way they should, or when something goes wrong...
 - ii. Sometimes we feel anxious for other reasons, and a way for us to feel in control is to plan, write down a list, or try to bring some order to the unknown.
 - 1. For some people control is a way to soothe an anxious heart.
 - 2. But what always happens?
 - a. The perfect list, the awesome design, the exact timeline is always goofed up – and we feel anxious and out of control again.
 - iii. Another example of calming our heart – or seeking peace through control – is trying to manage the behavior of others.
 - 1. How many times have we acted like the director of a play during the family gatherings?

- a. We put this person over here... we don't give any booze to that guy over there because he will cause trouble... we carefully plan the seating arrangement including where the kids will sit so that parents don't get upset.
- 2. All this managing of people gives us a false sense of security and peace – because people are unmanageable!
- e. Sin entered the world long ago – and the result is always the same – brokenness... broken things, broken situations, and broken people.

IV. **God stops us from seeking our peace through control.**

- a. Peace is not about gripping someone with white knuckles and forcing them to do whatever you think is right.
- b. Peace is not about planning everything to within 30 seconds and making everyone feel your anxiety to stay on schedule.
- c. Peace is a Person – the Prince of Peace... the Word made flesh.
 - i. He broke through the barrier that separates heaven and earth... and came into a chaotic mess with peace.
 - ii. He says that the kingdom of heaven is now here... or another way to say that is that the reign of God has been put squarely in the middle of our humanity... our broken world.
 - iii. Jesus brings peace by stepping into the middle of our troubled world and letting Himself be the center of the world's anger and sin.
 - 1. In that center, He brings us peace through the cross.
 - 2. Peace has come through what seems to be chaos and death – a horrible punishment and execution for an innocent man.
 - 3. And yet, the peace that Jesus brought by first coming into the world as a baby, and then dying on a cross for our sins is an enduring peace.
 - 4. Thousands of years of enduring peace, as we are saved by His grace through our faith.

V. **The result of God's peace in our lives is the ability to let go.**

- a. We take to heart the fact that the star of peace is definitely not held up by our plans and control.
- b. God's peace doesn't come by our control, but from hearing His Word.
 - i. It's a major change to reverse things from trying to be in control to allowing His Word to control us.
 - ii. We will consistently be let down when we try to control and plan with our own desires... but when we turn our will and our desires over to the care of God... Peace comes in a very different way.
 - iii. God's peace comes to us when we let go and let God.
- c. So the gift of peace has come through the birth of the Child, the Son of God.... And we find our peace does not come from our own works and control... but in following Him, the Prince of Peace.

- i. Peace rests on Him, and therefore we rest in faith in all that He has done... for us. Amen.¹

¹ Based on Advent series: "Paavola, Daniel Dr., *Peace Came to Earth*, Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2023