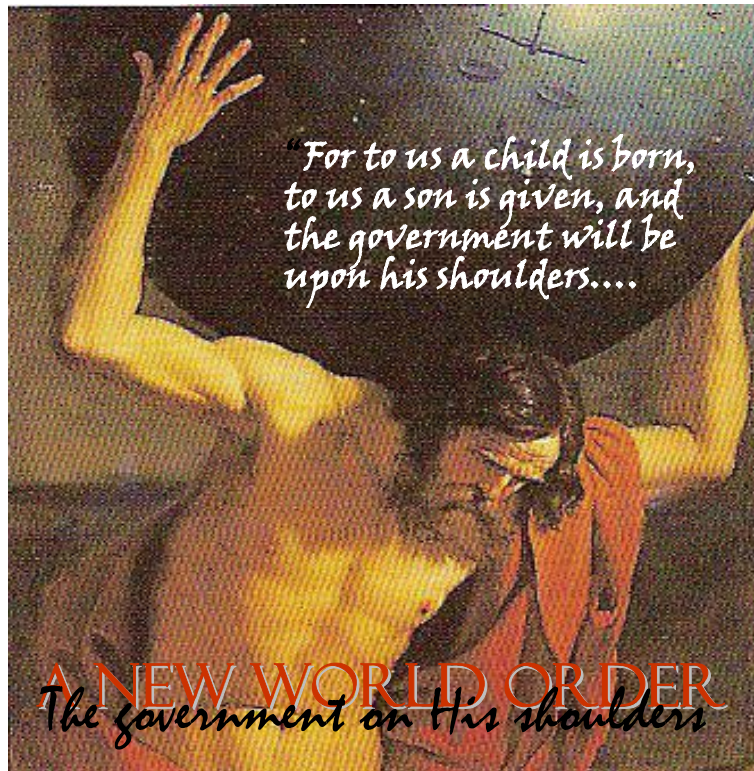


The Covenant Pulpit



“PEACE: Prince of Peace”

Isaiah 9:1-7

Dr. Robert Petterson

Covenant Advent Series 2009

at 6926 Trail Blvd, Naples, FL 34108

(239) 597-3464

www.covenantnaples.com

John Lennon of the *Beatles* pleaded, “All we are saying is give peace a chance.” Plato answers back. “Only the dead have seen the end of war.”

Since the year 3600 BC the world has only known 292 years without war, computing to fifteen years of war for every year of peace. During

that time there have been 14,600 wars killing four billion people. The value of property destroyed would pay for a wall of pure gold 97.5 miles thick and 33 feet high completely encircling the globe.

In the 65 years since World War 2, there have been 140 wars killing 180 million people. In sixteen minutes a US nuclear sub can unleash more killing power than all the bombs and ammunition exploded by all the nations in the Second World War. Our 21st Century capacity to kill on a grand scale brings to mind humorist Will Rogers' quip: "You can't say that civilizations don't advance. In each new war they learn how to kill you more efficiently." Albert Einstein, whose theories unleashed the nuclear age, lamented, "I do not know with what weapons World War 3 will be fought, but World War 4 will be fought with sticks and stones."

At Christmas we remember the song of the angels, "Peace on earth, and good will toward men." But ever since Cain killed his brother in a fit of rage, humanity has been marching toward Armageddon. Why this fatal attraction to war? In James 4:1, the half-brother of Jesus asks,

"What causes fights and quarrels among you?"

Why do our homes become battlefields? Why are there fights on school playgrounds? What causes road rage and church conflicts? Why do we cry, "Peace, peace!" even as we stockpile weapons of war? Today, in Isaiah 9:6, we come to the fourth title for the child who will carry the government on his shoulders: "And he will be called...*Prince of Peace.*" Verse seven adds, "Of the increase of his government and *peace* there will be no end..." Here's the fourth and final principle of our advent series:

**There can be no peace between people
unless there is peace *within* people.
There will be no peace within people
until they are at peace with God.**

Since 1675, America has only known 30 years without war. After spending his career keeping the United States out of even more wars, diplomat Francis Meehan observed, "Men are at war with each other because each man is at war within himself." That doesn't mean that all conflict is wrong. Evil flourishes when good people do nothing. The Bible rallies us to "put on the whole armor of God" so we might "fight the good fight." In his book *The Jaguar Smile*, Salmon Rushdie wrote, "Facing a long and uphill battle, most people settle for peace at any cost." But Christians must say with Martin Luther, "Peace if possible, but the truth at all costs."

Yet, most conflict is birthed by sin. Even holy causes are corrupted by unholy hearts. There is only one warrior who wages truly just war. Isaiah says of him in verse seven, "...He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with *justice* and *righteousness*..." Revelation 19:11 says of him, "With *justice* he judges and makes war." No one else, no matter how holy their cause, can ever say they fought an absolutely-*just* war with purely-*righteous* motives. In James 4:1&2 the half-brother of Jesus gives the reason for most fights:

"Don't they come from your desires that battle *within* you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you can't have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God..."

At the heart of all war are covetous hearts. James would say that nations march off to war, and tiny tots fight over toys in the nursery, for the same reason: discontented with what they have, they lust after and seize what belongs to others instead of asking God to supply their needs. Winston Churchill revealed his covetous heart when he saw war as a means to advance his political career. When Europe's best young men were being butchered in World War 1, he wrote in a letter to a friend,

"I think a curse should rest on me—because I love this war. I know its smashing and shattering the lives of thousands every moment—and yet—I can't help it—I enjoy every second of it."

During the first battle of the Civil War at Bull Run, the gentry of Washington DC brought their picnic baskets, spread their blankets on the hillsides, and watched men slaughter each other on the battlefield below. Today we watch war footage on CNN and play virtual reality war on violent video games. Like ancient Romans, we love the smell of blood in the arena. That's why we are desperate for the *Prince of Peace* to bring us under the dominion of his government and give a peace that knows no end. How are we to understand and grab hold of this peace?

1. This peace is personal and global; partial and permanent

Isaiah gives his prophecy to a war-weary nation some 700 years before Christ. Empires are rising and falling in Isaiah's world: first Assyria, then Babylon, and after that Persia. Each conquers the Middle East, and then is destroyed by a new superpower. Because of its strategic location, tiny Israel becomes the bloody battleground for these warring empires.

But, in verse four, Isaiah promises a Messiah who will shatter the yoke of Israel's oppressors. Verse five promises that he will burn every

warrior's bloody garment in the fire, putting an end to all wars. Verse six goes on to say that he will then establish a new world government. Verse seven says that only then will there be a peace that has no end. No wonder verse six calls him *Prince of Peace* and the angels later greet his birth with, "Peace on earth, and goodwill toward men."

But you could argue that there has been no peace since Jesus' birth. Since that first Christmas, Israel has been under successive occupations by Romans, Byzantines, Islamic armies, Christian Crusaders, Ottoman Turks, and the British. Scattered across the globe, Jews have suffered inquisitions, pogroms, and holocausts. Even after she became a nation in 1947, Israel has not known a moment without war. The final war in history will be fought at Armeggedon in Israel's Valley of Jezreel. If Jesus is the *Prince of Peace*, why has Israel had no peace? Why has there been more war on planet earth *since* Christ's birth than before?

First of all, Isaiah is talking about *personal* peace. On the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus said to his anxious disciples in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you..." St. Paul speaks about this *personal* peace in Philippians 4:7 as "...the peace of God that passes understanding..." I like Helen Keller's take on that verse: "I do not want peace that passes understanding. I want understanding that brings peace." What understanding brings peace? It is that which sees peace is forged *with* God by trusting in his Son as your Savior and Lord. Once Christ is in your life, you have peace *within*. When there is peace in your soul, it changes how you relate to other people. This is *personal*, not global peace. But when Christians have found peace *within*, it begins to change their little portion of the earth. Husbands and wives begin to submit to each other in love, families find harmony, broken relationships are restored, churches are unified, and communities are healed. This peace may not be global, but it can be *personal*. It ebbs and flows because sometimes even the best of Christians get caught up in the passions of their flesh. So this peace is only *partial* this side of heaven.

But verse seven sees something bigger: a *global* and *permanent* peace at the conclusion of history. Isaiah 9:5 says, "...every garment rolled in blood will be destined for the fire..." Isaiah is looking way beyond the birth of Jesus to a post-Armegeddon world. He sees the final great battle that St. John describes in Revelation 19. The baby of Bethlehem returns as the King of kings, riding a white war horse, his eyes blazing like fire, a sword coming out of his mouth to strike down the armies of a global coalition that have converged on Israel. Revelation 19:15 says of this Warrior King, "He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." In an awful display of shock and awe, he annihilates this mega-force along with kings and generals. Flocks of vultures darken the

skies, descending to gorge themselves in the Valley of Jezreel. The bones of vanquished millions are picked clean, leaving a valley littered with bloody piles of empty uniforms. Isaiah says that those “garments rolled in blood” will be thrown into the fire, never to be used again.

War will end on earth because human government will be abolished. In his play *King Arthur*, John Dryden wrote, “War is the trade of kings.” Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre added, “The rich wage war, but the poor do the dying.” In his book *War*, Voltaire observed: “It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers at the orders of their kings and to the sound of military trumpets.” Why then do people so willingly march off to war when kings rattle their sabers? Historian Will Durant gives this answer: the promoters of wars bang the drum of patriotism. They promise that their wars will bring peace on earth and prosperity to the victors. But only the rich get richer from these wars. In the end, the wars we wage today spawn more wars tomorrow and almost always bankrupt every nation involved.

But a day is coming soon when the *Prince of Peace* will descend with a shout! With justice he will wage the only righteous war ever fought on this earth. The King of kings will smash the kings who laid the crushing yoke of their governments on the shoulders of the huddled masses. The lords of war will be dragged before heaven’s bar of justice. Standing with them will be the profiteers of war, king-makers, tax-and-spend politicians, greedy bankers, wife-beaters, baby-killers, child-abusers, and all the prophets and preachers who lacked the guts to speak out against their injustice and unrighteousness. The billions who have been beaten down and beaten up will rise like ghosts from the ashes of war, crying for justice from the *Prince of Peace* who sits on the Great White Throne. His judgment must be swift and terrible for the German proverb is true: “In the aftermath of war only three armies are left behind: an army of cripples, an army of mourners, and an army of thieves.”

Catch your breath when you read Isaiah’s promise of a King who established his throne in verse seven. See the difference between him and the gang that runs Washington DC. While they run up trillions of dollars in runaway debt that will lay the crushing burden of their ruinous government on the shoulders of children yet to be born, this king carries his government on his own shoulders. He establishes a throne that sits on an everlasting foundation of righteousness and justice rather than the backs of his people. Christmas declares that a day is surely coming when His peace will be *global* and *permanent*. Because of that, you can have peace now, even in the face of government run amok.

2. Peace comes with a choice: the kingdoms

of kings or the kingdom of the *King of kings*.

Isaiah begins his Christmas prophecy with these words in verse 1, "Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress." Isaiah's world is a gloomy place. Israel's economy is in the tank, its kings are impotent, and its military is powerless to stand up to the global terrorism that is destroying their tiny country. If you lived in Israel, you would be gloomy too.

But, in a world spiraling out of control, Isaiah says, "...there will be no more gloom..." A lot of Americans are gloomy today. Just as Isaiah's countrymen were staring at the end of their nation, a lot of pessimistic Americans are wondering if we aren't seeing the beginning of the end of our Republic. But Isaiah would say to us at Christmas in 2009, "...there will be no more gloom..."

Our problem is that we have put too much faith in human government. We believed that our security was in *Wall Street*. We looked to *Medicare* rather than God to take care of us in old age. We thought that affluence purchased on easy credit would buy happiness. We have become dependent on a *Nanny* state to give us cradle-to-grave care. The Bible calls this kind of government *Babylon*. Babylon offers to take the place of God, deceiving us with promises of care that only God can deliver. But Babylon is also called the *Beast* in the Book of Revelation because, instead of feeding us, it devours us and everything we possess. Its identification number is 666. In apocalyptic literature, 6 is the number of man and 3 the number of God. 666 is the governments of men playing God. When Washington begins to look like Babylon, we need to take care lest we end up with a tattoo of 666 etched across our hearts.

Yale University just released its list of the most memorable quotes from 2009. My favorite was the one screamed at a congressperson in one of those public forums on health care held last year: "Keep government's hands off my Medicare!" Do you see the ignorance and irony in that statement? It doesn't matter whether it comes in a conservative or liberal flavor; if we are trusting in political solutions we have already drunk the *Babylon* Kool-Aid. Do you want joy instead of gloom? Isaiah would say that it comes by, not putting your trust in the kings or kingdoms of this world, but in running to the child of verses 6&7 for your refuge. Do you want peace instead of anxiety? Then let the King of kings lift the yoke of oppressive pessimism off your shoulders. Let him turn your little piece of this world into a haven of soul rest. God's people have lived through far worse times, and experienced the peace *within* under far worse governments. It's not that we should roll over and let Washington DC become Babylon on the Potomac. As concerned citizens, we remember

the words of 1950s newsmen Edward R. Murrow: "A nation of sheep begets a government of wolves." But let's keep a proper perspective. Any peace we find in a better government is only *partial*. The peace that is *personal* can only be found within souls redeemed by the *Prince of Peace*. The peace that is *global* and *permanent* can only come when the King of Kings comes to establish his everlasting kingdom on earth.

3. For now, we must deal with the desires *within*

What do we do between that first Christmas 2000 years ago and the last Christmas that will ever be held on earth before the return of the King? The half-brother of Jesus says in James 4:1&2 that we can bring peace to our own corner of the world. He tells us that wars and quarrels come because of "...the desires that battle within..." He goes on to say, "You want something but you don't get it. You kill and covet, but can't have what you want." The root of all war, whether in the home or church, on the playground or in the halls of congress, is a desire for more. From the time Eve lusted after the forbidden fruit, humans are never satisfied with what they have. Discontent is the mother of all conflict and war. James says, "...you covet..." Covetousness is a vile thing. It causes us to lust after that which belongs to others. It is the myth of the greener grass. Children think they will be happier if they can grab other kid's toys. Teens strive for popularity. A spectacularly-beautiful wife couldn't satisfy Tiger Wood's insatiable appetite for more. So he became a serial-adulterer. His wife thought he was giving her the security and love her heart craved. When she found out it wasn't so, she began to beat him with a golf club. The *Tiger Woods* wars are being fought in homes across America. And lest we get too judgmental, we all have a *Tiger Woods* heart that covets more stuff, more prestige, more affirmation, and more of so much more. Nations go to war to steal their neighbor's oil fields and church folks go to war to get their favorite flavor of worship.

The half-brother of Jesus gives us the solution at the end of James 4:2: "You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God." In short, we look to others to fill the infinite, god-shaped vacuum in our souls. Nothing in this creation can meet our needs. After we have sucked everyone around us dry, we will still be empty. Your spouse can never love you enough. Your children will never please you enough. Your church can never care for you enough. The politicians you vote for will never solve enough. James says your problem is "you do not ask God." Only he can fill your needs. Only the *Wonderful Counselor* will truly understand you. Only the *Mighty God* is strong enough to lift the weight of the world off your shoulders. Only the *Everlasting Father* will still be there after everyone else has abandoned you. Only the *Prince of*

Peace will calm your heart when everything else in your world is spinning out of control. When you figure that out, you will find the peace your heart so desperately seeks.

4. The KING must sit on the throne and the old king has to die.

King Herod may have been a madman, but he understood that there is only room for one king. Jesus said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Neither can a throne with two kings! Herod refused to give up his throne to the King born in Bethlehem. To keep his throne, he set out to kill the rival King. America is full of Herods who have killed Jesus by eliminating his presence from the public square and acting as if he doesn't exist in their own personal lives. The Christmas story begs a question that you must answer: Have you gotten down off your throne? Herod understood what a lot of Christians fail to grasp: if the one king is to live, the other king has to die. Who will it be in 2009: Jesus or you? If Jesus is to live on the throne of your life, you have to die to self, die to running your life, die to thinking you have to fix your world, die to trying to micromanage the lives of those around you, and die to using others to meet your needs. Only when you die will you finally live in peace with God, peace within yourself, and peace with others.

5. Peace doesn't come from inside you, or around you, but from above.

After years as a Communist and atheist, British writer Malcolm Muggeridge gave his life to Christ. He gave up on finding his peace in political solutions. He wrote, "Christ doesn't come from the right or the left, he comes from above." Eastern Mystics will tell you to conjure up your peace within. Western materialists will tell you to find it from the creation around you. But Isaiah says that it comes only from the heaven above you. In verse six he says, "...to us a child is given..." God gives him to us. He comes from outside our world, a special delivery gift from heaven. Wise men looked to heaven above for the answers to this world's problems. People of wisdom to the same the same today. How about it, will you let him lift the world off your shoulders as your *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace?*