

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on December 5, 2021:**

**"Is Seeing Believing?
The Second Day of Advent
(Luke 3:1-6)"**

**Second Sunday of Advent – Peace
Romans 5:1, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have PEACE
with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."**

[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman, at church in the Y, shows us that we can't truly believe our salvation unless we see it by experiencing it.]

Introduction:

- Today is the second Sunday of Advent, what we might call, a day of peace rather than adversity, which we'll take every day.
- Now, in the passage today, the phrase that is put out there is "seeing salvation."
- Typically, we don't think about seeing salvation, but rather believing, which leads to salvation.
- But, in order for us to really believe this at some level in our hearts, we need to see it before we truly believe.

- And, today, we're going to see why peace is so important to a Christian believing life.
- And it's something we easily can take for granted, so we're going to address this concept of peace and what it means for us today.
- At this time, there wasn't much peace, but yet these verses in Luke 3 are about a message of peace.

Luke 3:1 (NASB), Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, 2) in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.

- We know that John had a role to play, as herald about Jesus and what he was about to do in terms of changing the world forever.

3) And he came into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; 4) as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "THE VOICE OF ONE CALLING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS, 'PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'

- In other gospel passages, we see the relationship between John's mother, Elizabeth, and Jesus' mother, Mary.
- Now, John the Baptist was going to experience times of anguish along with Jesus and His disciples and those who were witnessing what was ultimately going to happen to Jesus.

5) EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE LOWERED; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH; 6) AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD!”

- Seeing is experiencing.
- Now, when we think about salvation, we think about believing, we think about knowing.
- But today, in seeing salvation, is to really experience peace in a different way.
- Peace is spoken of, so often in scripture, that when you do a search for the word “peace” on Bible Gateway, there are over 300 verses that include the word.
- We also discover that peace in the Old Testament is related to sacrifice and it’s often called, “peace offering” which ultimately lead up to what Jesus would do.
- Now, a peace offering is much different than this spiritual concept of peace.
- Often times, we think of peace as an emotional fulfilling. So when, we are on edge about something, we would like to have peace restore us.
- Now, there’s certainly nothing wrong with that, but as we take a closer look at the word “peace”, it goes so much more deeper than that.
- So, peace is not just the taking away of anxiety, but it’s restoring our relationship.
- And, when we understand peace, we can truly come to see salvation and experience it in a different way.

A Deep Dive Into the Rich OT and NT Meaning of Peace (Shalom – Hebrew word; Irēnē – Greek word):

- We’re going to see, how these two words tie into salvation and why peace is so emphasized, as an Advent term and why it’s appropriate that we walk away with a deeper understanding of why we hold up peace in the second day of Advent.
- So, in the Old Testament, among the Jewish people, peace had a really deep and broad meaning to it that was tied, in multiple ways, to socio-economic prosperity.
- And the Hebrews thought at that time that if they were blessed by God, it was not something that humans generated but that it was something God gave them.
- They thought God was blessing them because of their efforts.
- And this kind of concept is going to eventually get twisted, which it did.
- Even in the New Testament, the Jewish people thought they when they were doing well, God was blessing them and enriching them socio-economically.
- And, if God wasn’t, then that must have meant that they were doing something wrong.
- They believe that this was a cause and an effect relationship with God.
- This was easy to do when you look to passages about cursings and blessings in Deuteronomy without a different perspective.

Now these concepts come from Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988) from Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Vol. 2, pp. 1634–1635). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Peace. Total well-being, prosperity, and security associated with God’s presence among his people. Linked in the OT with the covenant, the presence of peace, as God’s gift, was conditional upon Israel’s obedience.

- So, not only was peace tied to socio-economic prosperity, it was also very much tied to covenant relationship.
- The Jewish people had this quid-pro-quo relationship with God, but it wasn't based on grace and mercy.
- And this has messed up a lot of people in a lot of religions over time in so many ways.

In prophetic material, true peace is part of the end-time hope of God's salvation. In the NT, this longed-for peace is understood as having come in Christ and able to be experienced by faith.

- So, we're starting to move now out in the right direction because the prophets Isaiah and others were tying peace to Jesus.
- And were beginning to see that peace is not just based on that covenant quid-pro-quo relationship, but centered in Jesus, where it should be.

In the OT, Shalōm, the most prominent OT term for "peace," held a wide range of connotations (wholeness, health, security, well-being, and salvation) and could apply to an equally wide range of contexts: the state of the individual, the relationship of man to man or nation to nation (e.g., absence of conflict, and the relationship of God and man).

The presence of shalōm in any of these contexts was not considered ultimately as the outcome of human endeavor, but as a gift or blessing of God. It is not surprising, therefore, to find "peace" tied closely to the OT notion of covenant.

- So, God is working with His people and Pastor Craig always thought the Jewish people were always special.
- And in that specialty, God chose them and therefore it's axiomatic that non-Jewish people are not special.
- But, this is not what God had intended. The Jewish community was used as a model to show what God ultimately wants to do through Jesus.
- And, the Jewish community was a kind of womb, so to speak, to bring Jesus into this world for all of humanity.
- And, it's this peace that comes from Jesus is foundational.

Shalōm was the desired state of harmony and communion between the two covenant partners (God and man), its presence signifying God's blessing in the covenant relationship, and its absence signifying the breakdown of that relationship due to Israel's disobedience and unrighteousness.

- How many times, can we find in Old Testament language, this concept of backsliding or straying off the path? Quite a few.

Shalōm becomes a pivotal term in the prophetic writings. It was the "false" prophets who, forgetting the conditions for national well-being within the covenant relationship, assumed God's loyalty to Israel would guarantee political peace forever.

Against such popular but false security, the preexilic prophets proclaimed the coming judgment precisely as a loss of this shalōm due to Israel's persistent disobedience and unrighteousness.

- These thoughts set God up as one who expects and needs a particular response in order to convey or to proclaim or to provide His blessings.
- This set's up God that He loves in a conditional way, which sets us up with problems, as well.
- But, we know that this isn't the case, because Jesus came to offer His life for the reconciliation of mankind.
- What Jesus did gets us away from this quid-pro-quo and fear, shame, guilt and doubt kind of relationship.

The prophets did, however, point beyond the crises of exile and subsequent setbacks to a time when shalom, characterized by prosperity and well-being, absence of conflict, right relations, restoration of harmony in nature, and salvation would again return.

- So, even though the prophets saw Israel as a nation not living in relationship with the covenant and therefore, falling out of grace, they also looked to a time when that would be restored.
- And they also knew that this restoration would come about through the King of Peace – Jesus, Himself.

Often this eschatological (or end time) expectation of peace in the OT was associated with a messianic figure, as in Isaiah 9:6 where the future Messiah is termed the "Prince of Peace."

Moreover, his reign would be one of "peace" not only for Israel, but would extend throughout the whole earth (Zech. 9:9, 10). The OT ends with this hope of peace still unrealized in its full sense.

- So, once again, we have an example that doesn't seem efficient, but if God's doing it, it's probably the most effective.
- In this day and age, we like to get things done through the most efficient means possible thinking its the most effective.
- But, we know that when we're dealing with people, it doesn't work that way.
- Efficiency works well with things, machines, high tech items, etc.
- But, when we're working with people through relationships, then we have to work effectively, because efficiency and effectiveness don't always combine.
- So, God, through this process, and through the power of peace, is slowly changing and transforming a nation, so that this plan of reconciliation, which was founded from the beginning of time, will ultimately take place.
- God is letting people fail, letting people make mistakes because it's through this environment how people are transformed.
- And that transformation cannot come without some pain and some inefficiency along the way.

In the NT, the Greek term for "peace" used predominantly in the NT is irēnē, a word expanded from its classical Greek connotation of "rest" to include the various connotations of shalom discussed above.

- So, from the Greek foundation, peace meant rest.

- But, we saw in the Old Testament, shalom meant far more than just rest or absence of anxiety.

As with shalom, irēnē could be used as a greeting or farewell (as in “peace be with you”), or could signify the cessation of conflict (national; or interpersonal, or the presence of domestic tranquility.

- How many times, have we seen Paul, Peter and others saying, “Peace be with you”, either as a greeting or as a farewell?
- This phrase really meant something to Peter and Paul.
- Now, when we really see what the New Covenant word peace means and how it’s tied to the reconciliation of humanity and how it’s tied to Jesus as the Prince of Peace, it means so much more.

The chief issue concerns how Jesus incorporated the OT hope for the eschatological peace of God into his ministry.

- So, God is conveying this through the covenant relationship and working with His people in creating this womb that ultimately will produce the life of our Savior Jesus

In the “benedictus” of Zechariah, the coming of Jesus as the Messiah is expected to “guide our feet into the way of peace”. So also the angelic testimony to the shepherds proclaims Jesus as the bringer of God’s peace to men.

That is, Jesus as the Messiah would usher in God’s reign of peace, that time of salvation longed for since the days of the prophets.

- So, as we’re going through this, seeing it and experiencing it, we are at the same time seeing salvation, experiencing salvation, witnessing salvation.
- That happens when we are seeing that peace that can only come from God Himself and specifically from the Son.
- And through Jesus, we have this same peace.
- And it’s through this peace that we experience that we come to see salvation and in fact seeing is believing.

Jesus’ self-understanding as expressed in the fourth Gospel corresponds to this association. This long-expected peace of God is Jesus’ “farewell gift” to the disciples, that which the disciples are given with the indwelling Holy Spirit now that Jesus has won his victory on the cross and reigns in power in heaven.

- So, at the end, Jesus’ last conversation at his last dinner, He told His disciples, “I’ve got much more that I need to share with you, but you can’t bear it.”
- It’s because they needed the Holy Spirit of peace in order to understand and see and experience that salvational relationship that Jesus was providing.
- Even though they had been with Jesus for 3 ½ years, they didn’t have it yet because their spiritual relationship with Jesus hadn’t been fully worked out yet.
- So, this farewell gift of the Holy Spirit is the essence and the catalyst for receiving and experiencing this peace and through this experience – seeing salvation.

The nature of this gift of peace brought by Jesus may be easier to explain by stating what it is not. It is not an end to tension, an absence of warfare, domestic tranquility, nor anything like the worldly estimation of peace.

- We too often think religion is a way to live the easy life and that faith in God is an absence of all things wrong, all things negative. But that's not the case.
- We see that this peace that comes from Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is truly something different than worldly peace and a lot more.

Its presence may, on the contrary, actually disturb existing relations, being a dividing "sword" in familial relations. Jesus' gift of peace is, in reality, the character and mood of the new covenant of his blood which reconciles God to man and forms the basis of subsequent reconciliation between men under Christ.

- We can say that this peace of Jesus took away any animosity or separation or offense between us and God that came about because of Adam's original sin.
- And this reconciliation of all mankind bringing Father, Son, Spirit and humanity back together again is truly the peace we're talking about.
- This peace has repaired any separation, any future potential separation.
- Now, this separation wasn't a separation of God to humanity, but rather humanity to God.

- So, this picture that we see that some evangelists, through the years, have developed puts God on one side of a chasm of the Grand Canyon and we, humanity are on the other side of the Grand Canyon.
- And in order for us to get to God, we got to put a cross, the cross of Christ over that gap and then come across.
- NO! – that's not the case.

- This peace that came about – what it did, in reality, through reconciliation, was that God came from His side of that canyon chasm to our side.
- We didn't have to come across to meet God, but rather, through Jesus, God the Father came across and joined us.
- That is the peace we're talking about.
- And that peace could not happen without God's grace, His mercy and His desire to have a familial relationship, from the beginning and for all time.

The early church understood "peace" in this same way as the final, end-time salvation of God given already through Jesus Christ. Peter preached the "peace with God through Jesus, the Messiah," while Paul similarly preached Jesus as "our Peace," bringing near through him those formerly far away from God.

- So, those on the other side of the canyon chasm were now brought back to God through reconciliation, whether they yet know it or not.
- All are included, without a clue, as we might say. Or not-yet true believers.

This peculiarly Christian understanding of "peace" (the Jewish hope of God's future peace believed to be a present reality through Christ) altered the content of the common greeting, "go in peace," as it was taken up in the Christian community.

- Can we see why that came such a defining way of interacting that every time they saw each other they made a reference back to this peace?
- This saying was tied to the very essence of their transformation that they had experienced.
- And it was based on the fact that this concept of peace was transformational.

In Paul's common "grace and peace" greeting, it is no longer a mere "wish" for peace which Paul extends to his readers, but is a reminder of the messianic gifts available in the present time through Christ to the man of faith.

In accord with this, Jesus is described as "peace" itself, while God, too, because of his act of reconciliation through Christ is known as a "God of peace". This gift of peace or reconciliation with God, made available through Christ, places an ethical demand on the Christian; it calls for the exercises of "peace" (as reconciliation between persons) within the church.

Peace, as a fruit of the Spirit, is to be the goal of the Christian's dealings with others, that which marks one's identity as a "child of God".

- So all of this says that we've been given this peace because we've been reconciled and are not separated from God and so we should treat others in the same way and extend to each other that same peace.
- In the church of God, we cannot allow socio-economic and cultural differences to divide us.

John 16:33: "These things (about peace) I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I (the Prince of Peace) have overcome the world."

- And so through communion, we offer each other that notion – "peace be with you."

Communion by Nan Kuhlman:

Blessing on the elements:

Oh great God, we are so thankful to participate in this ritual of communion because we understand that it pictures the sacrifice of Jesus. And it also, at the same time foreshadows the very sacrifices that we make as we move in this world in attempts to spread Your love throughout. So, bless these elements and we thank You again, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Comments:

- Nan is going to suggest to us that God needs us.
- Now, if you're really thinking about what she just said, you would think that God, our creator, is self-sufficient.
- Nan agrees with that thought, but she was just trying to be a little bold.
- God needs us, because God chose to need us.
- God chose to work through inefficient, flawed human beings.

- God chose to be vulnerable – chose to be born of a woman and chose to put on flesh just like us and endure some of the indignities that we go through.
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- One of Nan’s favorite Christian authors is Rachel Held Evans, who tragically passed away at a very young age a couple of years ago.
- She started writing a book before she died and a friend finished it for her.
- The book is called, “Wholehearted Faith” which was just release a month or so ago.
- Here’s Nan’s favorite quote from the book from page 11:

Before Jesus fed us with the bread and wine, the body and the blood, Jesus, himself, needed to be fed by a woman. Jesus needed a woman to say, “This is my body given for you.”

- So, let’s think about this on our second Sunday of Advent.
- God, who is true love, doesn’t force anybody to do anything.
- In reality, Mary was more than just a passive teenage girl.
- Mary saw God as a liberator of the poor and the oppressed.
- Now, here’s part of Mary’s song from Luke 1:51-53:

*He has shown strength with His arm,
He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts,
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, but has lifted up the lowly,
He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty.*

- Now, Mary choose to participate, and choose to let her body grow and nourish Emmanuel, God with us.
- She was a woman of valor, not a shrinking violet.
- And so, we are also called to be people of valor, unafraid to do what God calls us to do.
- We need to show our commitment to our actions – “This is my body given for you.”
- It’s pretty clear cut to think of this in terms of our typical church service.
- But, it gets a little murky, when we start to see that God loves all human beings and that we are called to love all human beings too, even the difficult ones and even the ones we disagree with and even the ones we find irritating.
- How does the statement, “This is my body given for you” translate into the practical side of our lives?
- We could say: This is my parking spot given for you; this is my spot in line given for you. This is my five minutes of free time that I wanted to spend reading given of you.
- So, as take communion, we first remember Mary’s example and how she went through the pregnancy, the pain of labor and birth and nursing and in all the beautiful and challenging parts of motherhood, which wasn’t easy.
- Mary participated by giving her body, her time and her love.
- And we are called to participate in that same way.
- So, now as we take communion, we should remember how Jesus took our hate, our feelings of separation from God, our actions and behaviors that reflect we don’t know who we belong to because we don’t know how deeply we’re loved.

- Think about how Jesus took all of that and said, “This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”
- So, we take the bread, which is the body of Christ given for you.

1 Corinthians 11:25, In the same way, he took the cup saying, “This cup is the New Covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

- So, we take the wine or juice, which represents the blood of Christ and the New Covenant given for you.
- Let's pray together:

Our beloved Divine, we're so thankful for the peace that is part of knowing how deeply we are loved, despite our flaws. And we celebrate that on this Second Sunday of Advent.

And pray that as we think about the body and blood of Jesus that we might be filled to be overflowing with love and peace that extends to all people. We're grateful for Mary's example and her willingness to participate.

So, we just pray for that same willing heart to share your love with others. We just pray all of this, in Jesus' name. Amen.