

Peace

On Sunday, we concluded our sermon series based on Isaiah's famous Christmas prophecy predicting what Jesus the Messiah would be like. This week we're exploring what it means to say that Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

1. Warm-up Question: Life is constantly trying to pump stress into us. Jeff reminded us of a Peanuts cartoon where Lucy insists she has inner peace, but still has outer obnoxiousness. We can probably all relate. Tell us about a time recently when you've exhibited outer obnoxiousness.
2. A well-known hymn begins by saying, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." It's a reminder that peace on earth begins with me. More specifically, peace begins within me. If I'm all stirred up inside, I'm going to move through the world like a bottle rocket waiting to go off.
 - a. Jeff said, "Peace is not an outside-in phenomenon; it's an inside-out phenomenon." In other words, peace is not the product of our outer circumstances, but of our inner state of being. Do you buy that? Is true peace divorced from outer circumstances?
 - b. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." John 14:27. Here Jesus distinguishes his peace from the kind most people experience. What might be the difference? Any thoughts?
 - c. Jesus also said, "I have said [these things] to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." John 16:33. Here Jesus seems to be saying that everyone who ever lives is going to experience lots of tribulation. How does that statement hit you? How do you feel about it?
 - d. What do you think Jesus means when he says he has "overcome" the tribulations of the world and so can we? What does "overcoming" look like?
3. Jeff suggested that the peace Jesus offers us – spiritual peace – is anchored in three great Biblical principles. As we internalize these three great principles, we begin to experience a peace that's out of this world, i.e., different from run-of-the-mill peace. How do we get that kind of peace? **Principle No. 1 – Accept that you are not in control. Do what you can to make things better, but surrender the rest.**
 - a. Jeff shared the story of our search for a new Worship Minister – and how none of our three leading candidates panned out – as an example of what it means to do what you can, while surrendering the rest to God. Given the unusual series of events (three strikes in a row), Jeff said God must be up to something and "in the right time, when circumstances are right, God will reveal to us who our next wonderful Worship Minister is supposed to be." Give us an example of a place in

your life right now where you're facing circumstances that you can influence, but not control. Have you surrendered the ultimate outcome to God?

- b. Why is inner peace impossible without first accepting that we are not in control?
4. **Principle No. 2 – Choose to be happy.** Whatever you're facing, however bad it gets, there are still reasons to rejoice. Don't get so caught up in all the drama of life that you lose sight of all the beauty.
- a. This past summer, a young woman name Jane Marczewski – stage name, Nightbirde – appeared on “America's Got Talent” and made Simon Cowell cry. Jane has life-threatening metastatic cancer. After singing an exceptional song and exhibiting lots of peace and joy, Simon asked her, “How do you do it?” She said, “You can't afford to wait till life's not hard anymore before you decide to be happy.” How does Jane's statement land with you?
 - b. Is happiness truly something we decide to choose? Why or why not?
 - c. Psalm 118:24 says, “This is a day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” As you moved through today, were you thinking “today sucks” or “this is a great day”? Which comes closer to how you've viewed today? Is it wrong to think “today sucks?”
 - d. In his book “Soundtracks,” Jonathan Acuff says that we constantly have soundtracks running in the back of our brain that have huge influence over us. He challenges us to start noticing those soundtracks and replacing negative soundtracks with positive ones. Take a moment to think about a soundtrack that's been running in your brain lately. What is it? Is it positive? If not, what do you need to replace it with?
5. **Principle No. 3 – Chose to believe.** Read Psalm 27:1-14, as printed on p. 3. As you do so, be thinking about which verse in this psalm most speaks to you.
- a. What verse in this psalm most speaks to you – and why?
 - b. In verse 3, David says he feels like he's surrounded by an army. In verse 13, he says he would have “fainted unless [he] had believed.” Believed what? “Believed [he would] see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” Jeff said, “It's hard to be too distraught if you truly believe that somehow, someday, God's goodness is going to prevail no matter what happens.” In your experience, is this just pie-in-the-sky thinking or is it real? Does believing in God's goodness despite all that happens make sense to you? Why or why not?
 - c. Harken back to the tough situation in your life that you described in Question 3a. As you face that situation, do you believe that somehow, someday, you will see the goodness of the Lord?

- d. Which of the three principles we've discussed do you most need to work on?

Psalm 27

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

² When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—my adversaries and foes—they shall stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

⁴ One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in God's temple.

⁵ For God will hide me in a shelter in the day of trouble and conceal me under the cover of the tent; God will set me high on a rock.

⁶ Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in God's tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

⁷ Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!
"Come," my heart says, "seek God's face!" Your face, LORD, do I seek. ⁹ Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! ¹⁰ If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up.

¹¹ Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. ¹² Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

¹³ I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. ¹⁴ Wait on the LORD, be of good courage, and God will strengthen your heart.