

When Christmas Lets You Down - Peace

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[0 : 00] Our passage this morning comes from Isaiah chapter 9, starting in verse 2. We read, The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy. They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For every boot of the trampling warrior in battle tumult, and every garment rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[1 : 10] Of the increase of his government, and of peace there will be no end. On the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it, with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

This is the word of God. Thank you, Rachel. Before we start, hey, can I pray for us? Father God, we come before you this morning with great expectations.

Great expectations not from a man speaking your word from front, but great expectations from knowing that you, God, will speak to us this morning. Great expectations of your Holy Spirit to work in our hearts this morning.

Father, we come with our hearts open this morning to hear your word. And as we read your word, as we listen to your word, Father, we pray that your spirit would work in our hearts right now throughout this service.

Father, help us to see the places we are failing. Help us to see your grace and your love as we listen in. And Father, we pray that you would be glorified, and you would be honored and respected over all.

[2 : 26] And we give you glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Okay, as I settle myself, because I'm a little shorter than Kevin, my name is Alan. If you don't know me, I oversee the youth here at Watermark.

And it's such a great privilege and joy and honor to be bringing God's word to us this morning. It's Christmas, and I can see the jackets are up. I can see the mufflers are up.

And it's one of those seasons that gives, well, at least for me, a fuzzy feeling. I don't know what it does for you. One of the few words that are associated with Christmas is joy.

And we were looking at it last week. Niels was telling us about the places that we look for joy, like maybe buying the latest iPhone or getting a ticket to Japan. And ultimately, these things might give you joy, but it's not true and lasting joy.

But the real and lasting joy can only be found in the true source of joy, which is Christ Jesus. And in a similar way, in today's sermon, where the title is Unwrapping Empty Gifts When Christmas Lets You Down, we're going to look into the word peace, especially the promise of peace, which kind of and ultimately lets us down.

[3 : 41] So let us dive in. So what comes into your mind when you think or when you hear the word peace? Is it a beach somewhere in Maldives, sipping some virgin mojito and laying back and getting the tan that you always wanted?

Or is it some cozy place in your living room when you dim the lights and sip hot chocolate and with soft jazz music at the back? Or maybe for some of us, it's just a quiet, warm walk in the nature, just going alone or maybe with your loved ones.

What comes in your mind when you think of peace? The great wisdom of this age, Chad GPD, defines peace as, very loosely defined as, absence of conflict, violence, and disturbance. And again, a sense, a kind of calmness and rest, there's a kind of rest. Now, the thing about these three things is that we don't have to go very far to actually find all of these three things around us, right?

I mean, it can be something as simple as you're having your quiet time after long hours of work, drinking coffee, and this really irritating guy comes and he wants to share something about his life with you.

[4 : 57] Or maybe it could be some relationships that has gone sour. Maybe it's a conflict with your friend or a colleague that just came out of misunderstanding. Maybe an argument with your loved one that seems to go on and on and on, or that seems to happen every Sunday morning before you come to church.

Or maybe it could be something as simple as, well, not as simple as, something as common as for college students, deadlines and assessments that goes on and on and on. Especially this season of time, right?

Or maybe it could be some long working hours, especially before Christmas and New Year holidays, where your bosses have this impossible task that you've got to finish before you go on off to Japan or somewhere else.

Or maybe for Hong Kong, it's just the culture of that is so competitive, that's so performance-based, that it feels like you've got to be at the top on your toes, got to be the best, got to perform all the time, and it just feels so tiring.

Or maybe it's just for young parents, maybe it's just you never get any quiet or any peace at home because of the noise and chaos.

[6 : 06] I mean, I could go on and on and on and on, but it's not a new thing for us to know that the city that we live in is not exactly a peaceful city. I mean, peace is not exactly the word that anyone would describe Hong Kong as.

Maybe busy, maybe competitive, maybe fast, but peace would be somewhere at the bottom of the list. And after all of these things, the Christmas comes in, the December comes in, IFC starts playing the Christmas carols on their shopping malls, and then you feel like, ah, you just want some kind of rest after all of this.

So what do we usually do? Maybe some of us would buy a ticket to Mali's, like I said, somewhere, any way away from this cold. Just go there, get the tan. Or maybe you just go back home, light the scented candles that you brought from the S&D; last week, the mulled wine flavor.

Oh gosh, that was so good. And just lay back and relax and chill with soft jazz music or rock music, whatever gives you peace. Or maybe it's just for parents sending their kids away to their grandparents so you can have a time of peace.

I don't know. I mean, all of these things are not necessarily bad. It is good. But we can all say, and we all know that once the scented candles goes off, once the playlist finishes, and once the vacation is over, so does the peace that came with it.

[7 : 33] I mean, it seems that the external circumstances has changed for a bit, only to return as soon as you come back to reality. It seems that the external temporary thing that gave you peace is just for a while, just waiting for you to come back into the restlessness and the chaos of life.

I mean, and it's the kind of restlessness that kind of keeps us awake at night, right? Thinking about future, finance, relationships, conflicts, singleness, work, family, life, and maybe for some of us, even our own sinfulness, a habitual sin that never seems to go away, things that leave you to despair, a kind of restlessness in our heart that leaves us awake at night.

So what is this promise of peace this Christmas? So what does God's Word have to say about peace? A true peace that does not seem to go away when the candles go away.

So let us look and dive into today's Scripture and look at this first one, the promise of peace. So you'll find the Scripture in your bulletin, Isaiah 9.

Let's open up to the Scripture. You can follow in your bulletin or on your phones or Bible. So this promise that we just read, Rachel read for us, it's a promise that has been written in a context to a nation that is kind of heading downwards, spiraling into destruction.

[9 : 04] I mean, this, if you read the previous chapters of Isaiah, you'll see that this is a nation that has a lot of injustice, a lot of chaos, a lot of civil wars, sinfulness, corruptions, and bribes, and no one was taking care of the needy and the poor.

There was no love for the neighbors. And to top it all off, all on that is this enemy nation that was coming from top, the Assyrians, that was coming to conquer them, and that nation was coming nearer and nearer.

And in fact, Isaiah, the prophet, actually prophesied that this nation is going to conquer you, is going to enslave you and put you under their rule. So it is a nation that is steeped with worries, steeped with conflicts, violence, disturbance.

I mean, peace is not exactly the word that you would describe Israel at this point of time. So in that kind of context, God speaks through his prophet Isaiah, and he gives this promise.

And we come face to face with the promise of God, God's promise of peace, God's promise of salvation and freedom. But first of all, look at the kind of people this promise is being spoken to.

[10:16] I mean, follow with me. Look at verse 2. Just a little below that. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness. In other words, people that are unsure, people that are not sure about the future, people that cannot see, people that are in cold and in fear, that are lonely.

Because of the darkness, not being able to see, fear of the future, people dwelling in deep darkness. A little below verse 4. For the yoke of his burden. People that are burdened.

It could be because of the unjust rulers that they had. Burdened because the nation is heading downwards. And just a burden of taking care of your family. What's going to happen in the future? Verse 4. Again, staff for his shoulders. Rout of his oppressors. People that were oppressed by the ones above them. People, the rulers, the kings that were supposed to take care of them.

Oppressed. And as you know, as the nation plunges down, the pressure of the people goes up. And that's pretty common, right? When the finance and economy goes down for the country, the pressure on the people goes up. And people that are oppressed. People burdened to go out and provide for their families.

[11:28] Unsure. Darkness. Lonely. Verse 5. Boots used in war. Garments rolled in blood. In other words, people that are in battle. People that felt like it was always war.

People that felt like they had to hold on to these garments of war because there's this kind of insecurities of this nation. Insecurity about what's going to happen.

They're holding on to these things that are insecure and in fear. And these are the kind of people that this promise is being spoken to. Darkness.

Darkness. In deep darkness. Oppressed. Beaten down. Insecure. Burdened. And not exactly peaceful. And I wonder how many of us feel that way this morning.

Or maybe this past few weeks or past month or even this past year felt like that for us. I wonder how many people in Hong Kong feel like that. A restlessness in our hearts with the worries of future and life because of the darkness.

[12:31] The high expectations of college, university, work that drives you to perform. That makes you feel like you've got to perform. That your value is based on how you perform.

Your value is based on how much you earn money. Enslaved. Oppressed. Or the insecurity that you might have about your work because of the fluctuating job market.

Or maybe even the lack of work. The insecurities and things that you hold on to. And it feels like a constant battle in life. Maybe a few seconds of peace.

A few weeks of peace. But a constant battle after battle. Almost like a cycle that never seems to end. Well, what does this promise speak to his hearers?

What does this promise speak to you and I? Let's go back to verse 2. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in land of deep darkness, on them light has shown.

[13:32] People in fear and darkness and loneliness are brought out of it. Verse 4 tells us that those who are burdened, who are oppressed, are freed as on the day of Midian.

What is the day of Midian, by the way? Basically, Midian talks about the story of Gideon, which rhymes. It talks about a time when God took a handful of people and took these people to fight against the Midianites, which was a huge nation.

And these people were armed with nothing more than clay pots, trumpets, and torches. And it was a time of incredible salvation and victory. Totally done by God and not by the people.

And what this promise is saying is that those who are being oppressed and burdened, God is going to do it again. He's going to free you as He did for Gideon and the Midian.

Verse 5 tells us that all the boots that were used for war, all the garments that were bloodied, will be used for fuel, for fire. In other words, you no longer have to fight. The restlessness that came from the insecurities and the violence and conflicts, you no longer have to go through it again.

[14:43] The insecurities that you had, which caused you to hold on to these garments, things of life that you feel will secure life, will be of no more use except for fire. In other words, the worries that you have right now, the things that keep you up at night, fears of the future, oppression, the competitive, the performance-based life, the culture, the value that is locked with how much you earn, and all high expectations of job, everything that keeps you on rest, that takes away the peace, that keeps you awake at night, will be at peace.

And man, isn't that an incredible promise of peace? For you, for us, for the people of Hong Kong, for the rest of the world, for all of the world, isn't that an amazing promise?

But here's the thing. Even though this is an incredible promise, it is nowhere as incredible and as beautiful as how God is going to bring about this promise.

The promise is nowhere near as breathtaking as how God is bringing it to the earth. And that's when we come face to face with the person of peace. Which takes us to our second point, the arrival of peace.

So how is God going to bring this peace? So how is God going to answer the problem of this restlessness, this injustice, the sinfulness, this corruption that was happening at that time?

[16:11] What is God's answer to all of the restlessness that keeps you awake at night? What is God's answer? And His answer is a child.

And that's incredible, right? Imagine you and your friend, imagine me and Marco, he's not here so I can talk about him, is going to be attacked by someone as big as Dan.

Dan is not here too, I can talk about him. A gangster, huge guy is going to beat us up. And Marco tells me like, hey Alan, don't worry, I got a solution. He runs off to his house and he comes back with a small guy as big as Isaac.

And he says like, this is my solution, he's going to save us from this massive gangster. It's pretty ridiculous, right? A child, a small kid, a baby is a solution for this massive unrestlessness?

On restlessness? But the thing about this child is, this child, this promised child was kind of different. I mean, look at verse 6 with me. I don't even have to say anything much more or add to it to see the magnitude of who this child really is.

[17:21] Verse 6 tells us, The child is born, a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And this is my encouragement to you, as you go into the week, take each day to think about each of those words. There's so much under it. But it's no mystery that this child is incredible.

It's something different about this child. Verse 7, I mean, it says, This child not only comes bearing peace, to bring peace, but this child is coming to rule with peace and with righteousness and with justice.

I mean, can you imagine that? I mean, today is the day of voting. But can you imagine where you have a government who is completely powerful, completely righteous, and completely just like this child?

I mean, I'm from India. I'm from Nepal. Imagine that in your country. Imagine you get a government like that. A government who fights for his people, who strives for the good of his people. A government that brings peace, justice.

[18:48] There's no more corruption. There's no more bribes, no more of that. The need and the poor are taken care of. I mean, relationship and character is prioritized. I mean, the culture of performance, the culture of value based on money, all of those are eradicated.

I mean, can you imagine living in that kind of country under a king like that? A government like that? A culture that takes cares of others rather than putting other people down.

I mean, you don't have to sleep with worries about what the future holds because you know that you can bank your life on this ruler, that he's working for the good of his people. And that's an incredible picture of peace.

And you know this is possible because the government is powerful. He's all powerful. In fact, the government is mighty God, everlasting father.

He's full of wisdom. And this child is coming to not just rule with peace, righteousness, and justice, but this child is full of wisdom.

[19 : 49] He's powerful for he is a mighty God. And his rule will have no end. And he is the prince of peace. And what an incredible promise it is to the people struggling in restlessness under oppression and fears.

What an incredible promise of peace. And what an incredible promise it is to you. Can you think about that? To have someone like that in your life.

Now let's take a breather as I drink my water and ask this question. What is peace? Man, this mic is so sensitive.

What is peace? I mean, we've been talking about it, right? Is the unrelenting? Is the absence of conflict, violence? You might be saying like, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's peace. But it would be a great injustice if I just leave it at that.

Because you see, in the Bible, in God's Word, peace has a much richer meaning than just that. I mean, in God's Word, peace is something much more than what Chad GPT defines peace as.

[21 : 00] And it is quite an interesting time to define peace in the middle of a sermon, right? But I feel like it's the perfect time because now we're looking into the peace that this son, this child is truly bringing.

So, well, how does God's Word define peace as? In Hebrew, it's called shalom. I'm pretty sure some of you have heard the word. New Testament, it's the Greek for irene, from which we get the name irene.

So now we know what irene means. And what it basically means is whole or complete. Or in other words, to bring something into completeness or to its wholeness.

For example, if you own a chess collection and if you have all the chess pieces, that means it's complete, it's whole. Or for example, when King Solomon completed the unfinished temple, he brought shalom to the temple.

He completed, he restored it. Or in the Old Testament law, when a person brings destruction or damages a neighbor's property, he pays the amount in full to restore the neighbor's property to its fullness.

[22 : 07] To bring complete restoration, to bring complete wholeness, is what it means to bring peace, to bring shalom. In other words, you take what's missing and you bring it to its wholeness.

So therefore, in the Bible, peace is not just an absence of conflict, not just an absence of violence and disturbance, but it's a restoration to its wholeness. Peace is not just when two people over conflict stop fighting, but it's actually when those two people strive to work for the other's benefit. It's not just the absence of conflict, but restoration to its wholeness. And whether that restoration be ourselves, our relationships, or the whole world around us, it's peace is to restore to its fullness and completeness.

So now we have this child, the Prince of Peace, the Prince of Shalom, the Prince of Wholeness and Completeness. I mean, it is no mystery to us this morning who this child is, right?

In Luke chapter 2, when the angels proclaimed the birth of Christ Jesus to the shepherds, they sang our praises, crying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased.

[23 : 14] Among many things, Jesus came to bring peace on earth. So what does this completeness, what does this wholeness have to do with the restlessness that you feel in your heart?

What does this peace, shalom, wholeness, and completeness have to do with the things that keep you awake at night? With the things, the external circumstances that never seem to change?

What does this completeness and wholeness have to do with all of that? Well, actually, a better question to ask is, where does this restlessness actually even begin?

Where does this thing that, what is this thing that actually takes away the peace? Because our usual thought is that the external situation is what brings the internal unrest.

But let us actually go back to Isaiah 9. Think about it. Where does all this unrest, this chaos start in Isaiah? Well, it starts in Isaiah chapter 1.

[24 : 11] I mean, if you have a Bible, you can see in Isaiah chapter 1, God speaks to his nation through his prophet Isaiah, and he says this, he tells the people, the ox knows his owner, the donkey its master's script.

In other words, these animals know who they belong to, but Israel does not know. My people do not understand. In other words, the unrest, the restlessness, the lack of peace actually begins, starts when people turn away from God.

You see, we usually think horizontal. We usually think our surroundings and the externals is what, when we think about peace and restlessness. But what we see in God's scripture is that it does not really start from there, but it actually has a lot to do with the vertical.

Peace and restlessness has a lot to do with our relationship with God. And it actually begins when people start walking away from the true source of joy, as we were looking last week, but also from the true source of peace.

Restlessness begins when people reject God's kingship, when people reject God as king, when we walk away from the one who created us in his image, when people walk away from the one who truly cares and loves them, who knows the number of hairs on their head, when people walk away from the one who created our inmost being.

[25 : 39] In other words, restlessness begins when in sin, we turn away from God, and in rebellion, we walk away, and tragically, walking away from life and peace.

It is the sin that separated us from God. It is a sin that has left us broken, has left the world broken, has left our surroundings broken, and our hearts broken, and ultimately has left us restless, finding for something that can never be satisfied.

In the midst of all that, then comes this child that was given to us. Christ Jesus who came to bring peace, who came to bring shalom, wholeness and completeness between God and man.

And you see, peace is never free. Peace is never free. There is always a cost under peace. And the price for the ultimate peace, the restoration of relationship between God and man, because of our sinfulness, and not just be at peace with God, but to bring into wholeness, to complete restoration between God and us, was paid by Jesus on the cross.

Romans 5.1 tells us, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus brought us peace by entering the most peaceless world and submitting to the wrath of the Father.

[27 : 14] I mean, I think we should stop and let that digest. Can you imagine that? Can you stop and think about that? Think about this. What gain did the creator of all universe, the king of kings, the all-powerful, all-sufficient God, what gain did that God have in making peace with you and I, who had nothing to offer to him?

So here is the real promise of peace this Christmas. And here is the invitation of Christmas by the Prince of Peace. So what does it mean for you?

So what does it mean as you lay awake at night with worries and fears? What does it mean for you as you grow anxious about your children, about your future, about their future?

What does it mean when you are pressured by the culture, when you feel like you got to perform as you go back to work? What does it feel? What does it mean when there are relationships that are broken in your life?

There are conflicts that doesn't seem to mend by itself. What does it mean when you face the pressure of singleness? What does it mean for our conflicts now that Jesus has brought and bought peace between God and men?

[28 : 32] What does it mean for you? Well, it means that for those that come to him in faith can be at peace. It means that you don't have to succumb to the pressure of the culture because you don't have to perform, but you can trust in Jesus and his finished work on the cross that he has done it and you no longer have to perform, that he has finished it and you no longer have to strive.

It means that as you worry about your children, that you can trust Jesus, that he loves your children more than you can ever do and that he has shown that and has proven that by giving his son Jesus Christ, that he gave his life and he loved you even before you turned towards him.

I mean, today's scripture said the son was given to you even before you asked. It means that as you worry about your future, your finance, your career, you can trust Jesus because he provided the means of salvation and peace even before we turned to him.

And if he can't do that, he's trustworthy to bank our lives on. Maybe you feel the pressure of singleness or life itself, but you can trust Jesus because of the peace that he has made.

You can be at rest because he is king. He is in complete control. That he is the wonderful counselor who will counsel you, who will guide you. And he is mighty God.

[29 : 57] That he is powerful and trustworthy. And I mean, in present times, as you go off from this service towards Monday, it may feel like your external circumstances are anything but peaceful, but there is also this incredible promise and hope that Jesus will one day return and come and restore, bring perfect shalom, perfect wholeness to all things, which I think we will talk about next week.

But for now, for this time, for our present, but even now, he has given us peace. I mean, many times we feel we don't have that peace in our hearts because we forget that Jesus is king, that he has finished the work, but he has given us peace regardless of how your external circumstances looks like.

I mean, Philippians 4 tells us, You see, it's a peace that cannot be explained.

It's a peace that cannot be formed with our limited words and alphabets and our languages. And it's a peace that guards our hearts and minds, our guards and minds like a wall from the worries and the lies of this world.

It guards our hearts from the pressures and the lies and the culture of this world and reminds us of the incredible peace that Jesus has brought us. I mean, just last few, last, I think the week before, I was having a dinner with one of our youths and I asked him a question.

[31 : 36] Hey, what was it for you that you actually suddenly realized that Jesus is real? What was it that helped you, what do you call it, the pen drop for you?

Pen drop? Pen dropped? What? Penny dropped for you. What was it? Something, something, the penny dropped for you. I don't know how to phrase it.

And he thinks about it for a while and he says, you know, I was going through a really tough time. It was really challenging, but somehow, I mean, this is a teenager.

Tough time for them. I mean, for us, their tough time might feel nothing, but for them, it's like their whole world. They're going through a really tough time and he says, I don't know, I was going through a tough time, but somehow, I was at peace.

And he said, and I was reminded of the verse, John 14, 27, where Jesus says, I give you peace, not as the world gives you. A peace that is quite different.

[32 : 39] And he says, as he felt that peace, as he felt God's presence in his life, somehow he realized, hey, Jesus is real. Jesus is real, that he is with me.

And regardless of this problem that I'm facing, somehow my heart is at peace. And we all have, and we all have a lot of stories like that. I mean, I have stories like that, where my mom went through cancer and somehow I had peace.

And you see, isn't that incredible? You see, Jesus not only promises peace, but he promises his presence. Tim Keller said this about peace.

He said, the peace of God is not the absence of fear. Another person said, it's not the absence of trouble. It's not the absence of pain and suffering. But it is in fact, his presence.

You see, your external circumstances may fail. Your external circumstances may look restless and anything but peaceful. But you can be at peace because of God's presence, of Jesus' presence.

[33 : 45] And isn't it beautiful that as we come to Christmas, as we think of Christmas and the birth of Christ, it was announced by the angels that this child's name is going to be Emmanuel, God with us.

God who's with you and with us. So you can be at peace because Jesus has brought peace. You can trust in his word in the way that he has brought peace because he is the prince of peace.

Now, I don't want us to walk away from that very quickly. Can I just call the band up and let us spend some time in prayer. Let us spend some time letting the Holy Spirit minister to our hearts this morning.

I mean, if you're new to Christianity this morning, here's an invitation for you to come and know the real peace. I mean, if you're weary, if you are tired, if you are burdened, if you feel like you have tried a thousand things, well, here's an invitation from the Prince of Peace to come and know him who is the true source of joy and peace.

And for the rest of us, hey, why don't we close our eyes and spend some time in prayer. Why don't we pray for the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts?

[35 : 07] For the Holy Spirit to show us in our hearts the places that we have been looking for peace. or maybe for many of us or some of us, it's just been a time of restlessness and really tough time throughout this Christmas or this year.

I mean, have you been burdened lately or even this past few months or year? Are there worries and fears that keep you up at night? Is there some kind of pressure in your life and oppression from culture, fears, fears, family, circle?

I mean, is it health and sickness? Maybe your own health or maybe the health of someone you love and care. Or maybe is it your own sinfulness, a habitual sin that chains you down that you feel like there is no peace from this sin and you're yearning from some kind of freedom from it?

Well, come and see the child that was born, the son that was given. Come and see the prince of peace who brings the promise of peace and restoration.

Come and trust him, the prince of peace, of whose the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. Come and trust him for the zeal of the Lord of hosts has done it and the work is finished.

[36 : 35] come and be at peace. Thank you for your time, peace yep!