



Peace

Kicking It Off

What's the worst "peace treaty" or compromise you've ever made that you later regretted?

Read

Isaiah 11:1-10

Summary

I've had people in the past tell me the secret to a good marriage, or really any relationship, is learning to compromise. I've been thinking about that, and I'm not sure it's actually true, at least not in the way we usually mean it.

When we talk about peace, what we usually mean is figuring out how to avoid conflict. You want this, I want that, so let's each give a little and call it good. But that kind of peace is temporary. It's more like a ceasefire than actual peace.

Think about how God loves us. He doesn't look at all our mess and say, "Well, I'll overlook some of it if you clean up the rest." His love doesn't work that way. He's completely holy and he completely loves us, and those two things don't cancel each other out. That's why Jesus had to actually fight and win against sin, not just negotiate a truce with it.

So when it comes to our relationships, the answer isn't really finding the middle ground between what you want and what the other person wants. It's both of you surrendering to God and trusting him to take care of you. That sounds scary because, yeah, you might get taken advantage of. You might give in and the other person might not. But look at Jesus. He had all the power in the world and he let himself be crucified because that's what the Father wanted. And through that surrender, he actually won.

The beautiful part is where this leads. Isaiah paints this picture of wolves and lambs living together, kids playing with snakes and not getting hurt. Everything made right. And that happens not because Jesus conquered by force, but because he gave himself up.

Real peace doesn't come from getting a fair deal. It comes from surrendering to God and trusting him to fight your battles.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. We often pursue peace by avoiding conflict or finding a middle ground where everyone gets something they want. Can you think of a time when this kind of "peace through compromise" turned out to be only temporary?
3. God's love is described as uncompromising, meaning he loves us completely without giving up any aspect of his holiness. How does understanding that God's love and God's holiness work together (rather than in tension) change how you approach him?
4. Surrendering our desires to God can feel risky because we might get taken advantage of by others. What fears come up for you when you think about putting others' needs above your own rather than negotiating for a fair outcome?
5. Jesus won his battle against sin not by overpowering enemies with force but by laying down his own life. In what area of your life might God be calling you to "fight" by surrendering rather than pushing harder?
6. Isaiah's vision describes a restored creation where former enemies live in harmony, something only possible through Christ's work. Where in your life do you need to trust that God can bring transformation that seems impossible by human effort?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"God's love for you is uncompromising. It stems from his love for us, which is not something he is figuring out which aspects he is willing to give up. The idea behind God's love is that it is in perfect harmony and in tandem with his holiness."

"If peace was able to be created through compromise, if peace was able to be created through a simple creation of a treaty, then Jesus really never had to die. In order to achieve peace, Jesus had to battle and he had to go to war with sin."

"When holiness, when righteousness, when perfection comes into the presence of wickedness, holiness does not make compromises with wickedness. Holiness does not make a peace treaty with the wicked. It goes to war."

"The reason why Jesus is significant is because the way he won the war was not by shedding the blood of others. He shed his own blood for us. The blood of Jesus is sufficient for the sin of the world."

Sermon Notes*Isaiah 11:1-10*

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*

*2 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*

3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

*He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,*

*4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.*

*5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.*

*6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fatted calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.*

*7 The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.*

*9 They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.*

Outline

1. The Darkness We Know

1. The reason we long for peace
 1. We long for peace because we understand and see the effects of war, conflict, and brokenness
 2. History is not marked by long stretches of peace but by cycles of war across cultures and eras
 3. The heart of humanity is selfish, always desiring more, always crossing boundaries
2. Modern approach to peace is flawed
 1. We have distilled conflict resolution into conflict avoidance; we do not like confronting what is wrong
 2. The world tells us that peace comes through compromise, through making concessions and treaties
 3. This kind of peace is temporary; it does not address the root problem of wickedness
3. Israel's monarchy failed through compromise
 1. Isaiah references "stump of Jesse" (not David) to show the monarchy's complete failure
 2. The kings failed because they compromised their adherence to God
 3. King Ahaz aligned with Assyria rather than trusting God; all kings ruled by their own wisdom instead of submission to God
 4. Isaiah prophesies exile: the line of David reduced to a stump, a dead thing
4. The gospel begins with honest assessment
 1. The gospel is not sugarcoated; it opens our eyes to see the world as a stump
 2. Saying "it could be worse" does not change the fact that it is bad
 3. Christmas becomes a time to wrestle with who can make things better

2. The Light That Breaks In

1. God brings life from death (Isaiah 11:1-2)
 1. From the stump of Jesse, a shoot rises; God creates life from nothing
 2. Human kingdoms fall, but God's promises endure through the true King
 3. The Spirit rests on this king with wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the Lord
2. The nature of the coming King (Isaiah 11:3-5)
 1. This king judges with righteousness, not by sight or hearing, but with equity for the poor and meek
 2. He strikes the earth and kills the wicked with the breath of his lips
 3. This is the language of war, not passive leadership willing to compromise
3. Holiness does not negotiate with wickedness

1. When holiness encounters wickedness, it does not make a peace treaty; it goes to war
2. If peace could come through compromise, Jesus would not have needed to die
3. God's love is uncompromising: in perfect harmony with his holiness, uncompromising toward our sin
4. Jesus won differently than the world
 1. The warfare of the world operates on a simple principle: the one who sheds the most blood wins
 2. Jesus won the war not by shedding others' blood but by allowing his own to be shed
 3. The blood of Jesus is sufficient for the sin of the world; no more bloodshed required
 4. Those destroyed in the end are those who refuse to surrender and submit to Jesus

3. Living as Children of Light
 1. Peace begins personally
 1. Before God judges nations, he offers individuals peace with himself
 2. This peace is uncompromising; we cannot keep our sin and simply add Jesus as a hobby
 3. Following Jesus is not a hobby but a whole life transformation
 4. The question: Are you willing to die to yourself and follow the king according to his ways?
 2. Surrender, not compromise
 1. In marriage and relationships, we do not compromise with each other; we surrender to the Lord together
 2. The Bible's response to conflict is not meeting in the middle but submitting to God
 3. We surrender our opinions and desires to God, not to our spouse or others
 4. This is how Jesus fought: by obeying the Father, even unto death
 3. The fear of surrender
 1. Yes, we may be taken advantage of; Jesus allowed himself to be bulldozed for the Father's will
 2. Jesus had the power to destroy his enemies but surrendered because it was the will of God
 3. Put the needs of others above our own; this is how God's kingdom operates
 4. The vision of shalom (Isaiah 11:6-10)
 1. Wolf and lamb together, children playing with cobras, no hurt on God's holy mountain
 2. Creation transformed, curse reversed, earth filled with knowledge of the Lord

3. No technological advancement or governance can solve the brokenness of humanity
4. This utopia is possible only because of the work of Jesus on the cross
5. The call to surrender
 1. The answer to anxiety, stress, and burdens is not more money, power, or success
 2. All the money in the world cannot bring peace to a heart at war with itself and with God
 3. Surrender to the Father through the Spirit by the blood of the Son to experience true peace

Notes

During the Advent season, we turn our attention to peace. It is a word we love, a concept we long for, and a theme that fills Christmas carols and holiday greetings. Peace on earth, goodwill toward men. But beneath the pleasant surface of this aspiration lies a harder truth: we long for peace precisely because we know war. We understand conflict. We have experienced brokenness.

The question worth wrestling with is not simply whether we want peace, but how we believe peace is actually achieved. And here is where our modern assumptions often lead us astray.

In our contemporary approach to conflict resolution, we have elevated compromise to the status of supreme virtue. From marriage counseling to international diplomacy, the advice is consistent: learn to meet in the middle. Make concessions. Find the arrangement where both sides get something, and call that peace.

This sounds reasonable. It sounds mature. But there is a problem with treating compromise as the pathway to genuine peace: God's love for us is not built on compromise.

Consider what this means. God does not look at humanity and say, "I will give up some aspects of my holiness so that I can accept you as you are." His love operates in perfect harmony with his character. His affection for us does not require him to make concessions regarding sin. His love is uncompromising precisely because it flows from his unchanging nature.

If peace could be achieved through negotiation, through a simple treaty between God and humanity, then the cross was unnecessary. Jesus could have brokered a deal. He could have said to the powers of darkness, "Let us find a middle ground. I will overlook some rebellion if you release some captives." But that is not what happened. Instead, Jesus went to war. He fought. He laid down his life. Blood was shed.

This tells us something essential about the nature of true peace: it is not the product of negotiation but of victory.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of a shoot coming forth from the stump of Jesse. This image is worth understanding. Jesse was the father of King David, and the reference to Jesse's stump rather than David's stump is deliberate. Isaiah is making a point about the complete failure of Israel's monarchy.

When the Israelites demanded a king, God gave them what they asked for. From Jesse came David, and from David came a dynasty. But that dynasty failed, not because God's promises were insufficient, but because the kings made compromises. They compromised their adherence to the Lord. They began to rule according to their own wisdom rather than in submission to God.

King Ahaz provides a vivid example. When the Assyrian empire threatened Israel, Ahaz did not turn to God for deliverance. Instead, he sought to align himself with the very enemy threatening his nation. He made treaties. He adopted foreign religious practices. He compromised.

And the monarchy ended as a stump, a dead thing, the remnant of what should have been.

Into this scene of death and failure, Isaiah speaks a word of hope. From this dead stump, a shoot will emerge. A branch will grow and bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon this coming king, giving him wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord.

We know who Isaiah is describing. This is the prophecy that Christmas fulfills. Jesus is the shoot from the stump of Jesse, the king who emerges from the ruins of human failure.

But we must pay attention to how Isaiah describes this coming ruler. He does not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear. With righteousness he judges the poor and decides with equity for the meek of the earth. He strikes the earth with the rod of his mouth. With the breath of his lips, he kills the wicked.

This is not the language of compromise. This is the language of war. Isaiah describes a general, a warrior king who speaks judgment and destroys wickedness.

We know Jesus as the Prince of Peace, and rightly so. But we must not mistake his title to mean he is without power or unwilling to confront evil. When holiness encounters wickedness, holiness does not negotiate. It does not draft a treaty. It goes to war. It destroys what is evil.

This should make us uncomfortable, because when we speak of wickedness, we tend to think of others. We imagine the truly evil people, the obvious villains, and we assume that when Jesus returns to destroy the wicked, we will be safely on the right side of that conflict.

But wickedness is not only a problem out there. It resides within us. There is brokenness in every human heart that should cause us to approach God with fear and trembling.

This is where the message of peace becomes intensely personal. Before God makes peace with the nations, he offers to make peace with individuals. Before he judges the world, he extends an opportunity for you and for me to enter into peace with him.

But this peace is uncompromising. It does not come with the promise that we can keep our lust and follow Jesus. We cannot retain our greed, our judgmental attitudes, our selfishness, and simply add Jesus to our existing life. The gospel does not work that way.

Yes, there are no strings attached to following Jesus. You might still struggle with being harsh or greedy. You might still battle the same sins that plagued you before you believed. The transformation is not instantaneous, and the struggle is real.

But here is the question: are you willing to die to yourself? Are you willing to lay down your life, your opinions, your preferences, your desires, and follow the king according to his ways?

Following Jesus is not a hobby to be added to an otherwise unchanged existence. It is a whole life transformation. When we sin, we do not make peace with our sin. We do not resign ourselves to defeat. We acknowledge that we lack the power to overcome, but we trust in the one who has all power.

The battle has been won. Jesus has already gone to war with sin and emerged victorious. The question is not whether he can defeat the enemy, but whether we will submit to his kingdom. Will we fly his flag? Will we live under his provision and acknowledge that we belong to his domain?

Too often, we want peace without justice. We want resolution without confrontation. We want conflict avoidance rather than conflict transformation.

This is true in our relationship with God, where we would rather not think about our sin and our need for a savior. And it is true in our human relationships as well.

The world tells us that a healthy marriage requires lots of compromise. You want your thing, your spouse wants something else, so you each do your own thing while sharing resources. Marriage becomes a business partnership, a negotiation aimed at allowing both parties to become fully realized individuals who happen to share a household.

But the biblical vision is different. In a healthy marriage, you do not primarily compromise with your spouse. You surrender to the Lord. You lay down your desires before God and trust that he will fight your battles. You put the needs of others above your own, not because you have been outmaneuvered in a negotiation, but because this is how the kingdom of God operates.

This is terrifying for many of us. If I surrender, will I not be bulldozed? If I lay down my defenses, will I not be taken advantage of?

The answer is: possibly, yes. There is a real chance you will be treated unfairly if you choose not to fight back in the way the world fights.

But consider Jesus. It could be argued that he allowed the Romans and the Jewish leaders to bulldoze over him. He had the power to come down from the cross and destroy his enemies. Why did he surrender?

Because it was the will of the Father.

This is how the king fights. Not according to what seems right to human eyes. Not based on feelings or biases. The king fights by obeying the Father. And he calls us to do the same.

The warfare of the world operates on a simple principle: the one who sheds the most blood wins. The one who conquers, who destroys enemies, who demonstrates superior force, that one is victorious.

Even when such warfare achieves peace, the cost is staggering. The great conflicts of human history, even those in which the "right side" prevailed, are marked by atrocity and bloodshed. The peace that follows is always shadowed by the price paid to achieve it.

Jesus offers something radically different. He won the war not by shedding the blood of others but by allowing his own blood to be shed. He destroyed wickedness not through violence against others but through sacrifice of himself.

The blood of Jesus is sufficient for the sin of the world. The kingdom of God will not require more bloodshed. The reason Jesus will ultimately destroy those who remain wicked is not because more sacrifice is needed, but because some will refuse to surrender. Some will look at the Prince of Peace, the one offering forgiveness and restoration and unconditional love, and say, "I do not want to follow him. I want to follow myself."

Before we wonder how anyone could make such a choice, we should recognize that we make the same choice regularly. Even as believers who understand the gospel, we still have days when we prefer our own way to God's way. The struggle is real and ongoing.

Isaiah paints a picture of what life looks like under the governance of Christ. The wolf dwells with the lamb. The leopard lies down with the young goat. The calf and the lion and the fattened calf are together, and a little child leads them. The cow and the bear graze side by side. The lion eats straw like the ox. A nursing child plays over the hole of the cobra without harm.

This is a vision of creation healed, the curse reversed, enemies transformed into companions. It recalls the garden of Eden and points forward to a world where harmony is restored, not only among humans but throughout all creation.

Some would suggest that humanity could achieve such harmony through technology, governance, or collective effort. If the world's governments would cooperate, if we applied our intelligence and resources, surely we could create a peaceful society.

This is folly. No advancement and no system of governance can solve the fundamental brokenness of the human heart. The reason we can believe that the kind of

society Isaiah describes is actually possible is not because of human potential but because of the work of Jesus on the cross.

Under this king's reign, creation itself is transformed. This transformation comes not through human striving but through trust in a king who performs miracles, who brings life from death, who does far more than we can comprehend.

If you feel anxiety, depression, worry, stress, the burdens of living in a broken world, and if some part of you believes that more money, more power, more success, more recognition would solve your problems, consider this: even if you received everything you desired, it would not resolve the deeper conflict.

All the money in the world cannot bring peace to a heart at war with itself and with God. All the time, all the space, all the human love available cannot address the battle between righteousness and wickedness that rages within and around us.

The good news of the Advent season is that God has sent his Son to die for us and to bring true peace into our lives. Those burdens you carry are real. The concerns you feel are legitimate. But the answer is not found in getting more of what the world offers.

The answer is surrender to the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, by the blood of the Son.

This Christmas, may you experience the peace of Christ that is readily available. Not the false peace of conflict avoidance. Not the temporary peace of negotiated compromise. But the true shalom that comes from submitting to a king who has already won the war, who offers forgiveness freely, and who is making all things new.

Blog

Last week we observed the first week of Advent and sat with Isaiah's promise that light would shine on those walking in deep darkness. This week we enter into the second week of Advent and turn to another prophecy from Isaiah. The theme is peace. But Isaiah's vision of peace is stranger and more comprehensive than we might expect.

The passage begins with what looks like death. A stump. Not a flourishing tree, not even a struggling sapling, but the remnant left after an axe has done its work. Isaiah says this stump belongs to Jesse. That name matters. Jesse was David's father, a shepherd from Bethlehem, nobody significant until his youngest son was anointed king. By referring to Jesse rather than David, Isaiah signals that the great dynasty has been reduced to its origins. The royal tree has been cut down.

But stumps are not always dead. Sometimes they send up shoots.

Isaiah announces that from this apparently finished dynasty, new life will emerge. A branch will grow from Jesse's roots and bear fruit. The Hebrew words here emphasize smallness. This is not a mighty oak appearing overnight. It is a tender green shoot on dead wood, easy to overlook, easy to dismiss. Yet this small beginning carries an enormous endowment. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on this coming king in fullness: wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Seven aspects of the Spirit (counting "the Spirit of the Lord" as the foundation) suggesting completeness. This king will lack nothing necessary for his reign.

The contrast with Israel's failed kings could not be sharper. They lacked wisdom, making short-sighted political calculations. They lacked might, depending on foreign power. They lacked the fear of the Lord, trusting empires instead of God. The coming king will be everything they were not.

Then Isaiah describes how this Spirit-filled king will rule. His delight will be in the fear of the Lord, not grudging obedience but genuine pleasure in alignment with God's will. He will not judge by appearances or be swayed by persuasive rhetoric. Human judges see surfaces. We hear only what people choose to tell us. We can be fooled. Not this king. He sees through to the truth.

And his justice will favor those who usually lose. He will judge the poor with righteousness and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. In the ancient world, justice typically favored those with resources. The wealthy could afford advocates. The connected had influence. The poor had neither. Under this king's reign, they will finally receive what every human being deserves: fair treatment.

This king will also "strike the earth with the rod of his mouth" and "kill the wicked with the breath of his lips." Peace, it turns out, is not achieved by tolerating evil. The king defeats it. His weapon is not a sword but his word. He speaks, and wickedness falls.

We sometimes imagine peace as the absence of conflict, the state we reach when everyone agrees to get along. But that is not Isaiah's vision. True peace requires that what opposes peace be overcome. The same Messiah who blesses peacemakers also brings a sword against everything that destroys shalom. There is no contradiction. You cannot have the peaceable kingdom while predators still roam free.

Which brings us to the most famous part of this passage: the vision of the wolf dwelling with the lamb, the leopard lying down with the young goat, the calf and the lion together, led by a little child. Cows and bears grazing side by side. Lions eating straw like oxen. Toddlers playing safely at the cobra's den.

This imagery is not sentimental. It is the reversal of Genesis 3. When Adam and Eve sinned, creation itself fractured. The ground was cursed. Enmity entered the world. What Isaiah sees is that fracture healed. Predation ceases. Fear dissolves. The created order returns to its intended harmony.

Notice that verse eight specifically pictures children playing near venomous snakes without danger. This directly reverses the curse of Genesis 3:15, where God declared enmity between the serpent and the woman's offspring. The threat that has shadowed humanity from the beginning is neutralized. The ancient enemy is defanged.

And then Isaiah tells us why all of this becomes possible: "for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

Peace is not primarily a program. It is not a policy achievement or a diplomatic breakthrough. Peace flows from knowing God. When the Lord is truly known, when his character and purposes fill human consciousness as completely as water fills the ocean, then peace naturally follows. This is why our best efforts at peace always fall short. We can manage conflict. We can negotiate settlements. We can enforce boundaries. But we cannot produce shalom. Only the spreading knowledge of God can do that.

The passage concludes by expanding the scope further. The root of Jesse will stand as a signal for the peoples. The nations will inquire of him. His resting place will be glorious. This is not merely Israel's king restoring Israel's peace. This is the world's king drawing all peoples to himself. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15 as scriptural warrant for Gentile inclusion in Christ's kingdom. What Isaiah glimpsed from afar, the apostles proclaimed as reality.

We know who this king is. Matthew tells us that Jesus grew up in Nazareth (likely connected to the Hebrew word for "branch") and that the Spirit descended on him at his baptism and remained. He embodied wisdom and understanding. He defended the poor and rebuked the powerful. He spoke with authority that demons obeyed. And through his death and resurrection, he defeated the ultimate enemy. The shoot has sprouted. The king has come.

And yet we still wait. Wolves still devour lambs. Children are not safe near serpents, or near many other dangers. Creation still groans. We feel the brokenness in ways large and small. We see it every time we read the news. We carry it in our own anxieties about what comes next.

This is the tension of Advent. We celebrate what has come while longing for what will come. We have peace with God through Christ; Paul says so explicitly in Romans 5. But we await the peace of all things. We know the Prince of Peace personally, and yet we still pray "thy kingdom come." The church exists in this in-between space as a kind of preview. We cannot force the peaceable kingdom into existence through our own efforts. But we can refuse to be predators ourselves. We can extend protection to the vulnerable. We can pursue justice for those who have no advocate. We can demonstrate in our common life what the coming kingdom will look like, former enemies reconciled at one table, the powerful defending rather than exploiting the weak.

Advent peace is not denial of present brokenness. We do not pretend the world is fine. We name what is fractured. But we name it as people who know the trajectory. The king has come. He will come again. His resting place will be glorious. The knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth.

We have peace not because darkness has disappeared but because we know who wins. The stump has sprouted. The king reigns. And his peace, the peace that rewrites creation itself, is as certain as the promises of God.