

Good morning, Fellowship! I'm really excited to be up here this morning and to continue on in our Advent series. We started with hope, prepared our hearts with preparation, and last week we talked about the joy that the birth of Jesus produces in us. And this morning we are on to the theme of peace.

Peace is something that we talk about all throughout the Christmas season. We sing songs about it, on the night Jesus was born the angels came declaring "Peace on Earth, goodwill toward men," Isaiah even calls Jesus the Prince of Peace. And that's very true, Jesus is our Prince of Peace, but I want to ask this morning, when you think of the Christmas season, is peace the word that comes to your mind? I'm going to guess not.

It's not for me. As soon as Thanksgiving is over, we ramp right up into the Christmas season. That means we've got to start buying presents. It means we've got to get ready for our Christmas series. I've got to get ready to work on Christmas Eve. That means we've got to send Christmas cards, which really means my wife Jessie has to send out Christmas cards, but I texted a few people for their addresses so that counts as helping. That means we've got like 3 Christmas parties a week to go to, and guys I've only got so many ugly Christmas sweaters. We have thing after thing after thing to do, and that's not even thinking about Christmas day.

I'm sure y'all's calendars are similar. You've got flights to catch and road trips to take, and husbands in the room, probably still some presents to buy. I'm sorry I know I'm supposed to be talking about how we can have peace this season and I think I've just stressed us all out. That's my bad. The Christmas season is so busy and full that instead of feeling peaceful, we often feel overwhelmed, stressed, tired, or anxious.

The definition of peace is "a state of wholeness or completeness" A state of wholeness or completeness. Is that how you feel right now? That should be our default this time of year because of Jesus. But so often we don't feel complete. We feel beat down and broken by the world and by ourselves and by the things that we go through.

But the Bible lets us know that we aren't alone in that. That there are other people who have felt that way, and their Savior is our Savior. Go ahead if you would and turn with me to Isaiah 40:1-2. If you've been with us the past few weeks you know that we've been connecting prophecies from the Old Testament to the birth of Jesus in the New Testament, and, spoiler alert, this is another one of those.

We're jumping into the middle of Israel's story here. God's people had once again turned their backs on Him. They were worshipping idols in the temple that was set apart for God, and because of that God gave them over to their enemies. The army of Babylon came in, burned down the temple, and sent the Israelites into the wilderness to die. They were exiled away from the land God promised them because of their own sins, and they knew and understood that.

But our God is a loving and compassionate God, and He didn't leave them in the wilderness forever. He reaches out to them through the prophet Isaiah and says in verse 1, "Comfort,

comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

"Comfort, comfort my people." After years of waiting and wandering, they receive a word from God. A promise that he would comfort them in the midst of their pain. When they translated the Old Testament to Greek, they actually translated the word "comfort" to "peace." God came to give them peace. When they were sinning, Israel needed what Paul Tripp calls the harsh grace of God. They needed to be shown that they were destroying themselves. That their sins against God weren't leading them to freedom but to slavery and death.

If you're a parent in this room, you know what it's like to discipline a child for their own good. You do it not because you don't love them or want them to suffer. You discipline them to teach them something, so they don't hurt themselves later. And after they've learned, after they've understood, you console them in their sadness. In Isaiah 40, that's exactly what we see. God's harsh grace is replaced with his comforting grace. The grace that says, it's ok. It's enough. You've learned, and I'm here. I will comfort you, I will console you. I will give you peace."

I love this passage because we can see the compassion of God really clearly. He intimately knows the hurt that His people have endured. In verse 2 He says to "speak tenderly" to Jerusalem, and even in their rebellion against Him, they're still His people. He still promises to love them and to lift them up.

Comfort, comfort to my people is what God promises the exiled Israel, and do you know what we see soon after this prophecy? Israel gets their first taste of salvation. A king named Cyrus puts an end to Israel's exile and places them back in Jerusalem. Almost immediately God comforts them by taking care needs as a nation. They're returned back to the Promised Land, and they turn and they worship God. But we know how this story goes. History repeats itself, and the Israelites kept sinning. They kept turning towards idols and away from God. Their sin didn't start in Jerusalem or in the wilderness. They carried their sin wherever they went because it was in their nature. It was in their hearts. Ultimately, they didn't need to be saved from the exile, they needed to be saved from themselves, just like us.

Back in Isaiah's day, they assumed the prophecy had been fulfilled when God restored them back to Jerusalem, but that comfort and peace only lasted for a moment. It had to mean more, it had to be a greater salvation. Thankfully, God's promise of comfort here goes far beyond just a return from Babylon. He was pointing forward to the one who would bring ultimate comfort for all of God's people, including us. And 600 years later in a temple in Jerusalem, there was a Jewish man named Simeon who recognized that.

If you would, go with me to Luke 2 and we'll start in verse 22. "And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of

the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.’”

The Bible does not tell us a lot about Simeon. This is actually all that it tells us. Just that he was a man of great devotion to God, that he was a righteous man, and that God had given him special revelation through the Holy Spirit. Simeon wasn't a priest, he wasn't a Pharisee, he was just a guy. Just a regular dude. But, the Holy Spirit was with him. This is big because the Holy Spirit wasn't with all believers at this point in time. Now when we believe in Jesus, we receive the Spirit of God, but in the Old Testament God's Spirit was only with certain people at certain times. And through the Spirit, God was pleased to say to this probably elderly man that he would not die until he laid eyes upon the promised Messiah. Here, Jesus is called the Consolation of Israel. He was the one who would bring God's ultimate comfort to a suffering people. He would console them, comfort them.

I do not know how often Simeon came to the temple, it could have just been a one-time thing, but if God told me that I was going to see the Savior of the world face-to-face, you bet I'd be at that temple every day looking for him. I assume that Simeon came almost every day looking for the Messiah.

Then one day, it happened. Simeon was at the temple, under leading from the Spirit, and he saw Mary and Joseph offering a sacrifice on behalf of their son, and he knew. In that moment he knew that he was looking at the one who was the Consolation of Israel, the one who would console and comfort God's people. And he can't help but praise God. Some people call his prayer the Song of Simeon, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation!” The word “peace” in his prayer is the exact same Greek word that we see in Isaiah 40 verse 1. The peace and comfort for all people is here, and that was enough for Simeon. After that he was ready to go home. He felt so much peace upon seeing Jesus that he was content enough die.

If we took a poll around this room I bet we'd all say that death is at the top of the list of bad things we experience as humans. Spiders are a close second, but death is at the top. But Simeon says, because of this baby, death is easy. Death didn't always lead to life, but because of Jesus it does. He was so at peace knowing that the Messiah that God had promised was finally here, that he saw death as a welcome home party, not as the end.

Jesus has taken care of our biggest problem, and Simeon knew that. He was at peace. He was whole, he was complete. And so are we. But then that begs the question, why don't we feel it? What steals our peace? Well, the Bible tells us. We're being attacked from three sides: the world, the devil, and the flesh. It's not a novel idea, but it's the key to why we struggle to feel peace.

This Christmas season, the world is pressuring us in all sorts of ways. We live in a world that is wholly opposed to Jesus and to the Gospel, so we're fighting a cultural uphill battle. Then there's the tug we all feel to fit in and to measure up to those around us. It's the social media driven pull we feel to be as good, as successful, as perfect as other people. You've got to have the best family, buy the best gifts, take the cutest Christmas photos, send the best Christmas cards. Then you've got to write the best caption on that Christmas card that perfectly sums up your year without sharing anything negative, because nothing negative ever happens to us.

I was joking with my dad the other day about Christmas cards like that and he said, "I want to get a card that says, 'Hey, this year was hot garbage, but God's good. We'll try again next year.'" But we can't say that, we've got to fit in. We've got to measure up, right? Wrong, we don't. It doesn't matter how much money you do or don't have, or if you've got the newest iPhone, or if your family has it all together, because none of us do. And because of Jesus we can breathe a sigh of relief, because we don't have to have it together. He did, and that's enough. I'd love to get an honest Christmas card that says, "Hey, this year was hard for our family, but God's good," because that's the Gospel. Life isn't perfect, but God is, and we can rest and have peace because of Him.

Something else, or someone else, that steals our peace is the devil. We know in our hearts that when Jesus saves us, we're safe, that it's finished. But the devil knows us, and he knows just what questions to ask and what thoughts to throw out there to make us question everything we know. It's the exact thing that he did to Adam and Eve. He said, "Did God really say that? Did God really mean that? Does God really want what's best for you?" That's all it took to send them spiraling, and we're the same. "Did God really forgive you for that? Are you sure? Then why does it still keep you up at night?"

Y'all the devil isn't slick. He's been doing the exact same thing since the Garden. He tries to make us question the goodness of God and we stop looking at our foundation, and then we have no peace because nothing is solid anymore. We've all experienced things that have shaken our foundation in God. Doubts creep in, diseases afflict us, we experience heartbreak, loved ones die, we struggle with lifelong sins, and Satan uses all these things to tell us that God doesn't really love us and isn't really good. But the good news is that he's wrong and he's a liar. God's love is real. He is for us, and He reaches out to us in grace, even when we're asking where He is.

We can trust God because we've seen Him come through for us time and time again. Simeon had peace because God promised Him something and he saw it come to fruition. The

hope that Simeon had led him to peace. Hope and peace are two sides of the same coin. We hope and trust in Jesus because we know that he's trustworthy.

The last thing that steals our peace is ourselves. It's our struggle against the flesh. And this can happen a couple of ways. The first way is that we think we've got to earn our way to God. Fundamentally, I think most Christians know that this isn't true, but so many of us show it in our actions and our thought patterns. "If I just read my Bible enough, pray enough, confess enough, lean into my calling enough, then God will accept me, He'll be happy with me." Then when we struggle with sin, we don't understand why. So we try to make up for it by doing "better." There's zero peace there. There's no peace in fighting to earn love. When we live like that, we rob ourselves of the peace that God so freely gives us.

The other side of the coin is that we can have a correct view of ourselves as sinners, but that leads us to despair. We assume we'll never be good enough and that even though God's saved us, that He did it reluctantly. He's good and He said He would, so He saved me, but He's not happy about it, and we lose ourselves in self-pity. This was my story.

When I was eleven I developed an addiction to pornography, and it was something that lasted until I was 19. I hated it, but I didn't know how to find freedom. Nothing seemed to work. And that affected me in a lot of ways that I don't have time to get into, but one of the biggest ways it messed me up is that it changed how I thought God saw me. For eight years I saw my life and a series of good and bad days. If I didn't look at porn, then it was a good day, but if I fell then it was a bad day. That's how I thought God saw me, that He was proud of me if I succeeded, and He was disappointed and upset with me if I failed. It's how I saw me, so I thought that God must have felt the same way. But God is so far and above us, and loves us more than we could ever know. There was a day where I was reading about the grace of God and it dawned on me that God didn't view my life as good days vs. bad. Because of Jesus He viewed me as perfect. I clearly wasn't, but that's how powerful grace is. You know what my next step was, I stopped trying so hard to be good and I just rested because I already was. When I realized that, things changed for me. I still messed up every now and again, but shame and guilt weren't a part of the equation. I stopped listening to Satan telling me I was condemned because I knew it was a lie. I trusted God, and eventually porn stopped being a part of my life, and I'm so thankful to God for that. But before He rescued me from an addiction He rescued me from a poor version of His love.

God delights in moving towards us, it's what we celebrate at Christmas every year. God incarnated Himself among us because He desires closeness with us! He lived among sinners because He loved us and wanted us. There's peace to be found in that truth.

One of my favorite scriptures in the whole Bible is Hebrews 10:22. It says that because of what Jesus has done for us, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." We have peace with God because every single part of us has been made clean through Jesus. Even our consciences! When we sin and feel guilt and shame and our conscience condemns us,

the Bible says that even that part of us is redeemed. Every part of us is acceptable to God because of Jesus. We can have peace and feel at peace because of how far and how deep God's grace for us goes.

As we wrap up this morning, Kurt's reminded of time and time again to not miss this Christmas season, to not forget to look to Jesus this year, and he's 100% right. But some of you in here may feel like the Christmas season missed you this year. Like everybody else jumped on the Christmas train and you got left behind at the station. Maybe this year it doesn't feel like Christmas to you. You may be away from family for the first time, it could be your first Christmas without someone, you could be in the middle of a massive life change and just struggling to make it through today. I don't know what it is for you. But what I do know is that even if you don't feel like it's Christmas, the Consolation of Israel was still born. The baby Jesus, who was born to die for you and for me, came into this world and died and rose again so that you could have peace and so that you could be at peace with God. I'll be honest y'all, it's been hard for me to feel like it's Christmas. I'm not sure why, but it's been a struggle to get into the holiday spirit. My favorite thing about the Gospel is that my feelings towards God don't change His feelings towards me. It's still true. We can have real, true peace, because Jesus has redeemed and is redeeming every single part of us, all the way down to our core. Our broken emotions, our strained relationships, our wrong focuses and motivations, everything. When we know that Jesus loves us in spite of all of those things, that's where true peace is found.

I'm going to pray for us and then the Young family is going to come up and light our Advent candles this morning. As the band plays us out, take some time and remember the Gospel. We can experience real, lasting peace because of Jesus, that's His gift to us this morning.