

# Peace. Justice. Hope.

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, for a wee while we're going to turn back together to the passage that we read in Isaiah chapter 9 and let me read verses 6 and 7 again.

For to us the child is born, to us the 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. 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. Now, it's maybe a wee bit frightening to say that it's only six and a half weeks until Christmas and that means it's still way too soon for Christmas jumpers, but it's definitely not far away now.

And I mention that because these verses are very often read at Christmas time and that's because they speak very, very clearly about the coming of Jesus. So here Isaiah is writing a message of prophecy.

[ 1 : 05 ] So Isaiah lived about 700 years before Jesus came into the world, but he spoke prophetically looking ahead to the coming of God's Son.

That period when Isaiah lived was a period of huge turmoil and difficulty for the people of Israel. And in the midst of that turmoil, God spoke through Isaiah to say that a savior is going to come and those words, those promises from Isaiah find their fulfillment in the birth of Jesus.

So these are very Christmassy verses and we'll read them again next month. I'm sure many times, but I want to look at them together this morning because what I hope we're going to see is that these verses also have a huge amount to teach us on Remembrance Sunday because today we don't gather with all the joy and excitement and delight of Christmas.

Today we gather so conscious that again and again and again people's lives have been devastated by war and conflict. And that's maybe more apparent this year than it has been in other times in my life and maybe in your life as well.

We see so much desperate suffering today in the Middle East, in the Ukraine, in other areas of conflict. And even as we gather today in a small community, we remember that it's not that long ago when people from here had to travel overseas because of war and many of them didn't come home.

[ 2 : 44 ] And so conflict is very real and today looking at the news headlines is becoming more and more difficult. And the key point I want to highlight for you today is that when we talk about the coming of Jesus, when we talk about the message of the Gospel, the message of Christianity, we are not talking about a message that just belongs in a nice cosy winter holiday.

We are actually talking about the message that addresses the deepest, most serious and most urgent human needs.

Isaiah did not prophesy from a school holiday. He prophesied from a war zone. And yes, Christmas is incredibly important, it's one of my favourite times of year.

Christmas is amazing. But the message of Christianity is no Christmas card. It's a message of healing and hope and salvation for a world that is desperately broken.

And these verses point us to some of the biggest issues that lie at the heart of the Gospel. And I want to look at three of these in particular. And so our title today is Peace, Justice, Hope.

[ 4 : 07 ] These are such important things for us to think about, especially on Remembrance Day. But they're also important things for us to think about, for all of us to think about as we go into our lives at the start of a new week together.

And under that heading, I'm going to say three things in particular. I'm going to say peace is better, justice matters, hope is real.

All of these truths lie at the heart of the Christian faith. So first of all, peace is better. These verses six and seven give a magnificent description of Jesus.

And all of them are in the language of authority and kingship. So it's all pointing to the fact that Jesus is coming as God's King. And these verses are speaking about his rule, his control, his governance.

And just as a wee word of explanation, sometimes it can be a wee bit confusing when you look at verse six because you see Jesus has been called wonderful counselor. Absolutely. He's wise.

[ 5 : 10 ] He's mighty. And then you read what it says, everlasting father. You think, oh, maybe that's actually talking about God the Father. And some people maybe say it is, but I think it's better to understand all of these descriptions as applying to Jesus.

And the language of fatherhood there is being used in the context of being a king. And in the Old Testament, a king was the one who had responsibility for the whole nation, functioned in many ways in a father's role, caring for that nation, looking after them.

And so I think that that's what's been pointed to here, that this is also a description of Jesus that he has that fatherly role as king. And then lastly, he is the prince of peace.

So the big message there is that Jesus is king. And that language of kingship, it's extremely important for understanding the gospel, but it's also really, really easy to misunderstand, especially when we talk about the idea of Jesus being in control.

That's really easy to misunderstand because that's subject of God's authority, God's control. It's very easily associated with the idea of fate. So people will often say, well, if Jesus is king, if he's in control and if he has authority, then he should fix everything.

[ 6 : 27 ] He should stop all conflict. In fact, he should never have allowed it in the first place. And lots of people will use that kind of reasoning to reject Christianity, the idea that, well, if he's in control, there's a kind of fate that he should fix and sort out.

But the key thing that we have to recognize is that fate, that fate kind of language views humanity as though we're simply puppets, just puppets, as though everything is logical conclusion.

It's viewing humanity as though we're just puppets, as though everything is controlled by some kind of higher God of some sort. As though everything is inevitable and consequently, we are ultimately not responsible.

Fate leaves humanity as puppets in the hands of some kind of higher power. What I want to emphasize to you is that the gospel never, never addresses us as puppets.

The gospel addresses us as people. People who can make choices. People who carry responsibility.

[ 7 : 37 ] People who can only truly function on the basis of relationship with others. And that freedom, that capability, that responsibility of humanity is what's enabled us to achieve amazing things.

But it's also what's led humanity to make some terrible choices. So we were created to enjoy the light and beauty of God and His creation.

We chose darkness. We're created to share beautiful relationships with one another. We've chosen conflict. We were created to cultivate and steward the amazing world that we live in.

We've chosen to live for the moment. We were created to know the one living holy, true, good God. We chose sin. We chose to turn away from him. And we chose all the desperate consequences that that brings. And it's all teaching us that when we say that the gospel has, that in the gospel Jesus is king, we're not saying that He's coming to control us.

[ 8 : 43 ] The gospel is saying that He's coming to rescue us, to restore us to everything that we were created to be. And a key part of that restoration is that Jesus has come to bring peace.

Peace in the bitter conflicts between humans. Peace in the deepest turmoil that you feel in your heart. These verses are telling us that Jesus is the prince of peace in a world ravaged by conflict. He has come to bring peace. And at the heart of that mission is the conviction that peace is better. Now that might sound so obvious.

It is, but it's incredibly important to think about. The gospel is grounded on the principle that peace is better than violence. Now you might be thinking, well, hang on, I've read quite a lot of the Old Testament.

There's a lot of violence in there. And that's true. Isaiah himself lived in the midst of conflict. But we must remember that the Old Testament functions as a shadow.

[ 9 : 54 ] And that shadow always does two things. It's like a signpost pointing forwards to the full reality that's coming. So the Old Testament is a shadow, a signpost pointing to the New Testament, which is the full reality of God's plan of salvation.

And that shadow does two things. It points forward and it also shows that the shadow doesn't work and that nothing except the full reality will actually accomplish God's purposes.

So the conflict that you'll read about in the Old Testament shows that there is a battle. The kingdom of God is at enmity with the kingdom of darkness and humanity desperately needs God's King to come.

But the Old Testament also shows that violence doesn't work. Ultimately the conquest defeats and everything you see in the Old Testament, they don't work.

And it's deliberate that they don't work because God is showing us that violence doesn't work. He's teaching us that his King is not going to conquer through military victories.

[ 11 : 01 ] God's kingdom is not going to advance through military force. Instead God's kingdom is going to be a kingdom of peace. It's governed according to the great principles of loving God, loving one another.

It's grounded on the principle that peace is better. And everything that one of us agrees with that. Everyone, everyone shares that principle.

Nobody gathers on Remembrance Sunday and says, I wish we had more war. Everybody longs for peace. Everybody knows that peace is better than violence.

I don't need to persuade any of you of that. But there's two incredibly important points that arise from this. The first is to recognise and I'm going to stick with me as I say all of this because it's going to sound complicated but I hope it's not too complicated.

First thing I want you to recognise is that only the Bible gives you a philosophical foundation for the conclusion that peace is better. You might be thinking, what on earth are you meaning?

[ 12 : 05 ] So let me say it again. Only the Bible gives you a philosophical foundation for the conclusion that peace is better. And this is where it's crucial to recognise the difference between what the Bible says and what other ancient religions said.

Other ancient religions said that the world was a product of violence. So you had the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon and they were in conflict with each other.

And the world came into existence as a kind of consequence of that conflict between the war and God. So in other words, it makes the world a product of violence.

Now all that sounds very mythical, very few people believe that sort of thing today. But the modern world in the West today who kind of doesn't believe in God and who views everything, views existence as a closed box of naturalistic causes, comes to exactly the same conclusion because it views humanity as the product of the survival of the fittest, which is another way of saying that and that makes us a product of violence.

And this is where we have to recognise that every single one of you in your heart knows that peace is better and yet the intellectual world that we live in today is tied to a philosophy that says we're a product of violence.

[ 13 : 47 ] And those two things don't fit together. The Gospel gives you a magnificent alternative because the Gospel claims that the world is the good creation of a good God and every human is the precious work of his hands that bears his image.

And that's where the Gospel is so different because the modern world says that we're ultimately a product of violence and ultimately violence is king.

The Gospel says peace is better and the Prince of peace is king. The second key thing that arises here is the point that in a world of conflict, peace comes at a cost.

Peace is better but it only comes when somebody is willing to take a wound. We see that today. We will stand outside around that war memorial in peace, in beautiful precious peace.

And all of that came at a massive cost. And this is so important for us to recognise because in the face of conflict so often people's instinct is to take revenge but revenge only escalates.

[ 15 : 04 ] You can see that. You can see that all around the world just now in terms of the news. Revenge escalates and peace only comes when people are brave enough to take a hit.

And we, as I said, we see that today in our national calendar remembering that the peace we enjoy came at such a cost. What I want you to see is that that truth lies at the very heart of the Gospel.

Sin has left us guilty and alienated from God. Sin has broken our relationship with God and it's caused so much damage to the world. Sin has left us in a mess and it's Jesus who takes the hit. Because he has not come to get revenge. He's not come to tell you to sort yourself out and improve. He's not come to give you this never ending list of do's and don'ts. Jesus has come to forgive you and me, to restore you. He's come to give you peace and he died on the cross to make it possible.

[16:07] A few chapters later Isaiah describes this magnificently. When talking about Jesus he says he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our inequities.

On him was the chastisement that brought us peace, with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the inequity of us all.

The Gospel is grounded on the fact that peace is better. In the Gospel Jesus is issuing a magnificent call to peace and he's calling you to come to him and find peace.

If you are here today longing for peace in your heart, please come to him. Come to him and find peace.

Second thing I want to say is that justice matters. One of the great truths emphasized throughout Isaiah. It's a long book but you'll find this coming up again and again if you read it all.

[17:10] One of the key principles in God's kingdom is the upholding of justice. In other words, at the heart of the Gospel is the fact that justice matters.

And that's part of what makes war so horrific. It's so unfair. And I think it's maybe even more unfair today because back in history if there was a war the people hid and the leaders went to fight.

Today all too often the leaders hide and it's men, women, boys and girls who are the ones caught up in the fighting. War is so unfair. Sin is so unfair.

We live in a world so full of injustice. But Isaiah is reminding us that justice matters to God and his kingdom has come to establish justice and to uphold it forever.

This raises lots of important points and I'm going to whizz through them very quickly. What am I giving you? I'm giving you four things I want you to think about here in relation to justice. Number one, this is crucial for our understanding of God.

[18:13] The Bible is absolutely clear. God is a God of justice and if you have any concept of God that views him as unfair then your concept of God is wrong.

God is a God of justice. Number two, we can also make the mistake of thinking that our understanding of justice is perfect.

And we've got to recognize that that's too hasty because if you think that you have an impeccable understanding of justice, if I think that I have an impeccable understanding of justice then my understanding of myself is wrong because humanity has an inescapable sense of justice but not an impeccable ability to determine justice.

In other words, we don't ever get it absolutely right when we try to figure out what is and isn't fair.

And that's because so often our sense of justice is shaped by our own interests, our own loyalties, our own insecurities.

So we've got to make sure we don't misunderstand God, we've got to make sure we don't misunderstand ourselves. Thirdly, we need to think about how much justice actually matters.

[19:30] So we're saying justice matters, how much does it actually matter? So this again exposes some of the problems with the kind of worldview of the intellectual culture around us, the worldview that's got no place for God because we see injustice around us, we're horrified, but we're powerless to do anything about it and a lot of people, let's face it, a lot of people who have caused a lot of desperate injustice are going to get away with it if there's no God.

But in the gospel justice matters eternally. He will establish justice and uphold it forever.

That's why the Bible speaks a lot about ultimate judgment. We see that in Psalm 98, God is going to judge the world with righteousness as people's with equity. We sang about it in Psalm 67.

Now, when we talk about the judgment of God, again, that's so easy to misunderstand because we think, oh, that's God being harsh. That's God being cruel. It's not, it's about God upholding justice.

Whenever you see that word judgment in the Bible, it is about God upholding justice. And we've got to recognize that justice matters far more to God than it does to us.

[20:55] And then fourthly, the whole question of justice is actually, it's a really difficult one because the more you look at it, the closer it gets to home.

It's a wee bit like me getting on the ferry and saying, oh, there's far too many tourists. So I'm heading off on my holiday and I'm like, there's far too many tourists. Which is just me saying, there's far too many tourists stopping me from being a tourist because I'm one of them as well. And that's where we see that when it comes to injustice and unfairness, we see that there's so much that there's wrong.

We see that there's so much that's a problem. But we find that, well, I find that the more I think about it, the more I think there is a problem. And then I think, well, actually we are the problem. And then I actually realize I'm the problem. Now, that's not, I'm not saying that, you know, you here are responsible for global conflict. I'm not saying that at all. What I'm saying is that I can't stand before you today and say I've always acted justly in my life.

[ 22 : 02 ] I've actually treated people quite unfairly at times. And it's definitely reminding us that the level of justice that God operates at is one that we can never match up to.

And that's why as we cry out for justice, we realize that we also desperately need mercy. And the amazing thing about the gospel is that that's exactly what Jesus has come to give.

Before Jesus, we are responsible. Remember, we're not puppets. We're morally responsible people. And yet in Jesus, we find mercy. And that mercy is poured towards us because on the cross, the guilt of our sin was poured out upon him.

And that's why in a desperately cruel world, we can cry to Jesus and say, bring justice and ultimately he will. But at the same time, when we see our own failings and mistakes, we can fall on our knees and say to Jesus, have mercy and he absolutely will.

Last of all, I want to very briefly talk about the fact that in the gospel, hope is real. As we've been saying throughout this, Isaiah prophesied at a time of great difficulty in Old Testament history.

[ 23 : 21 ] It was a time when the Middle East was a violent mess, just like it is today. Their nation was divided. Their society was full of inequality. There was foreign enemies threatening them.

Eventually they're going to get crushed. And in the midst of that turmoil, God sends them a message of hope through his prophets. And these words in Isaiah 9.67 are a message of hope, a message of salvation that one day God's King is going to come.

He's going to bring peace. He's going to bring justice in him. There is hope. And in the midst of global conflicts, in the midst of national struggles, in the midst of personal heartbreak, the one thing that we desperately need is hope.

But one of the most pressing questions that Scotland in 2024 can ask itself is this, is hope a temporary illusion or is it a permanent reality?

That's the question that our nation has got to ask itself. And it's the one that exposes where we are because I could ask anybody in the street, is peace better? They're going to say yes. I can ask them, does justice matter?

[ 24 : 29 ] They're going to say yes. But if I ask them, is hope eternal? They're going to say I don't know.

And if they think consistently for even a few moments, they're going to see that according to the kind of secular worldview of today, hope isn't eternal. It's actually just an illusion.

It's just temporary. All the hope that we talk about of a better world, a better place of meeting again without God, that's an illusion.

And this is where the gospel of Jesus Christ is so magnificently different because in the gospel, hope is real. Hope is permanent.

Hope is eternal. We do not gather in our churches each Sunday because the gospel is nice. We gather because the gospel is real.

[ 25 : 34 ] Jesus rose from the dead. And in a world where we are crushed by all the devastation of death, He has come to give us eternal life.

He came to die for our sins and He rose again. That's real. He's calling every one of us to trust in Him and follow Him and have eternal life in Him.

And when we do that, we become citizens of His kingdom, a kingdom that is grounded on a different way of living, grounded on loving God, loving one another, putting other people first, treating everybody as equal and carrying one another's burdens.

That kingdom is a new humanity that Jesus is establishing all across the nations of the world. It's a beautiful family. It's a church united together as one.

And for all who trust in Jesus, we come under His rule, His care, His protection. He's the one who's conquered death and we can be safe forever in His arms.

[ 26 : 44 ] And that means that we can stand at that war memorial today. And we can stand at that war.

And we can stand in front of a terrible diagnosis. And we can stand in the face of all the heartbreak that life can bring and we can say, there is hope.

That's what Jesus has come to give us. That is what the gospel is all about. In the gospel, hope is real and that hope is utterly amazing.

And that is what we want a whole community to know. We don't want you to think, like, this is where none of this sort of silly stuff that divides us and spoils our community.

None of that matters. The church is called and featured that none of that matters. What matters is that Jesus has come to give us hope in the face of death.

[ 27 : 51 ] He's come to give eternal life to all who trust in Him and knowing Him and knowing that hope is the greatest thing that can ever happen to you. It's the greatest thing that's ever happened to me.

It makes such a difference. That is what Jesus wants you to have. That is what Jesus is offering you. That's why it's so important that we respond to Him because you're not puppets, you're people. And Jesus is holding His hands out to you and He's saying, come to me. And you've got to take that step.

In the Gospel, peace is better, justice matters, hope is real. Jesus is amazing. Let's pray together.