Prince of Peace

Isaiah 9:1-7

KV 9:6

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

 I recall the first time I heard Isaiah chapter 9. I was approached by Ben West, who gave the message last week, about doing a Christmas skit for the Christmas service. I didn’t have a lot going on so I said sure. He handed me a script and it had two angels reading todays bible passage. But his skit didn’t make it clear it was an actual bible verse. Having never read the verse before I thought “wow that’s an amazing way to proclaim Jesus at Christmas”. Later when practicing I would sometimes get the words slightly wrong and Ben got irritated. I asked him why the exact words were so important and he said “Because it’s a bible verse.” He gave me the reference and I was shocked that in all my years at Christmas I had never heard or seen this verse. Moreover, I recognized that Handle’s *Messiah* was basically directly taken from this passage. Indeed, today’s passage is a proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The title of today’s message comes from verse 6 “a son is given.” In the first part of this message, I will discuss Isaiah, who he was, and the context of the prophesy. Second, the titles given to the messiah. Finally, I will talk about Jesus as our Prince of Peace.

 To understand this passage, it helps to understand who Isaiah was and where in the bible this passage fits. Isaiah was written during a period of wars and transition. When the kingdom of Judah was surrounded by powerful enemies. The kingdom of Israel was in decline and the Assyrian empire was ascendent. Under King Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) the Assyrians swept westward into Aram (Syria) and Canaan. In about 733 the kings of Aram and Israel tried to pressure Ahaz king of Judah into joining a coalition against Assyria. Ahaz chose instead to ask Tiglath-Pileser for help, a decision condemned by Isaiah in chapter 7. Assyria did assist Judah and conquered the northern kingdom in 722-721. This made Judah even more vulnerable, and in 701 King Sennacherib of Assyria threatened Jerusalem itself. The godly King Hezekiah prayed earnestly, and Isaiah predicted that God would force the Assyrians to withdraw from the city (chapter 37). Nevertheless, Isaiah warned Judah that her sin would bring captivity at the hands of Babylon. The visit of the Babylonian king's envoys to Hezekiah set the stage for this prediction (chapter 39). Although the fall of Jerusalem would not take place until 586 BC Isaiah assumes the destruction of Judah and proceeds to predict the restoration of the people from captivity. Isaiah is one of the major prophets. Isaiah and his contemporaries believed that God’s favor rested in the nation of Israel maintaining control of the land promised to Abraham. In Deuteronomy 11 God says that the nation of Israel will come to possess the land promised to Abraham. Deuteronomy 11:12 says “It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.” The decline of the nation was a sign that Israel had broken their promise to God, that they had strayed from his path so egregiously that now God would deliver them into the hands of their enemies. Isaiah unveils the full dimensions of God's judgment and salvation. God is "the Holy One of Israel" (see 1:4; 6:1) who must punish his rebellious people (1:2) but will afterward redeem them (40). Israel is a nation blind and deaf (6:9-10; 42:7), a vineyard that will be trampled (5:1-7), a people devoid of justice or righteousness (5:7; 10:1-2). Today’s passage follows from chapter 7 where we learn that Lord had spoken to King Ahaz asking him to depend on God and seek a sign. Ahaz refuses and God gives a sign anyways

*Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.” Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

We next learn that the threat to Israel had become so urgent that the people of Israel had begun seeking mediums and spiritualists rather than God. Isaiah says that God will crush and destroy Israel in his wrath for not obeying God and not depending on him. This brings us to today’s passage, one that demonstrates God’s intended mercy on Israel, despite its sin.

 Chapter 9 begins with the word “nevertheless” so in order to understand it we need to go back to chapter 8. In chapter 8 we are told these spiritualists and mediums were would see only “distress and darkness and fearful gloom”. By contrast God was going to do something amazing “Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan.” In ancient texts its common to associate a nation with a person. For example, Jacob was renamed Israel and his descendants were also called “Israel”. So honoring “Galilee of the nations” means that someone was to come from Galilee. In Matthews gospel we learn this person is none other than Jesus Christ. While Jesus was born in Bethlehem, an angel warned Mary and Joseph to flee with Jesus after Herod sought to kill all the babies born in Bethlehem to avoid a challenge to his rulership. Later during Jesus ministry, he would be challenged when the pharisees said “no prophet has ever come out of Galilee”. Clearly, they had not only not read this verse, they had also not read 2 Kings 14:25 where he learn the prophet Johan came from Galilee as well. During Isaiah’s life this area had been annexed by Tiglath-Pileser III, and it was commonplace during Jesus time to associate the messiah with a political revolutionist. Someone who would redeem the land promised to Abraham back to Israel. Lets look at the next few verses, which make up the main point of the passage:

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.* *Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.*

Here we learn the messiah will dawn a light on those “living in the land of darkness”. We learn that he will increase their joy and there will rejoicing as if at harvest. In John’s gospel we learn that Jesus is the light of the world. Through him we have great joy. Jesus says “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Jesus shatters the yoke that burdens us. The last line “*Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.”* Is a reference to the end of war, a time when we will burn all our weapons and lay down arms. In a spiritual sense Jesus ends the hostility between God and man. Ephesians 2:14 teaches us “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” The main point of this passage is proclamation that there will come a day when a savior from Galilees brings great light and rejoicing. When a savior shatters the yoke that is laid upon us and ends war once and for all. Although Isaiah’s contemporaries may have understood this to be a political savior. The next part of the passage makes it clear it is something much more. Let’s read it together:

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

The word “for” here is in the sense of “because”. War will cease and darkness will give way to light *because* God will give a child and the “government will be on his shoulders”. This is a very odd way to proclaim a political revolutionary. In some sense all leaders and great men were once children who were born- but the emphasis on a “child born” says that something will be special about the child himself. Something about the child’s identity itself must be special. In the New Testament we learn why he was a remarkable child. First, Jesus was born to a virgin by the Holy Spirit who was God himself. Second, Jesus was the son of God who was God incarnate. Third, in the second chapter of Luke we learn that as a child Jesus astonished learned teachers of the law “all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers.” (Luke 2:47). We learn that the Messiah will be a *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* He will be a *wonderful counselor*. Wonderful here means “so great that it can’t be comprehended or described”. This is certainly the case. We sing every month or two when Kit does praise “who can know the mind of the Lord?” (Romans 11:34). The second part of the title “counselor” in ancient Israel idiomatically meant “wise leader”. Solomon was portrayed as a “counselor” in 1 Kings 4:34 for example. We can be sure our messiah Jesus is listening because He told us to pray to Him about our worries (Philippians 4:6; James 1:5). We can be certain He has our best interests at heart because He loves us (1 John 4:19). And His love is so wide and deep (and wonderful) that we cannot fully understand it (Romans 5:8). The next two titles *Mighty God* and *Everlasting Father* are mostly self-explanatory. Our God is an awesome God and he reigns forever. He has the power to do all things for him nothing is too hard. Of note, many Jews believe this passage refers to King Hezikiah but calling King Hezikiah *Mighty God* is an offense of the same king that the Jews accused Jesus of: blasphemy. The last title *Prince of Peace* is the final, and perhaps most important title. I want to talk about this one a bit more in detail.

 Earlier in the passage we are told the Messiah would end war “Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.” We are now told that the he will bring an unending peace. He will reign forever with justice and righteousness. This is amazing given the nature of war. War has been going on about as long as humans have been around. The first recorded war in history happened a 30-minute bus ride away from Nazareth in Tel Megiddo in 1457 BC. It involved 20000 combatants and 2000 chariots and occurred when Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III decided that he would put down a rebellious group of Canaanite vassal states. While the city and the citizens were spared it was sieged for 7 months and only 340 men in the defeated army survived. It was such a horrific experience that the word “Armageddon” in the Hebrew takes it root from the city name. This site ends up being a battle site again 800 years later. You can read about this battle in II Chronicles 35:20–25. Despite my difficult childhood, Christmas was always joyous. Our family was poor so we would always get gifts from charity and those gifts usually included candy. One holiday my great Aunt, whom I had never met took me and my brother to go buy toys. I had never been inside a mall let alone a toy store. It was always a happy time. Looking back my family despite having no money always found ways to make my Christmas not so much different from other children. When I was adopted, I recall the first Christmas my adoptive parents went way out of their way to make it special. My most special Christmas was in the Philippines, where I got to play Santa for a group of Filipino children. Christmas was so special in the Philippines. But these last few years Christmas has become a sad time for me. Every year I have to fight and mediate between family members who don’t like each other. Every year this family member expects to see me and that family member doesn’t want me to see that family member because of something they said or did 4 years ago. And then on top of that last year my brother died. His absence was everywhere. But from this message I learn the problem is that I have been thinking of Christmas in terms centered around mere people. Christmas is about Jesus and to focus on him and this passage we learn that he himself is the prince of peace. Though we may face war and trials he is our peace. So as evil and cruel as war is, we should hope beyond hope to its end. And that is exactly what we find in the Messiah himself. “He himself is our peace”. Jesus Christ has come to bring peace to all nations. He is the *Prince of Peace,* rescuing us so that one day there will be no more night. We will not need light because the Lord God will give us light. And Christ will reign forever by the zeal of the Lord Almighty.

While Christmas time is to be a joyous celebration of the of messiah. We often have wars of our own going on in our lives. Whether it’s exams, health problems, family or marital issues- Satan wars against us. Philosophers would likely argue that our salvation is here on earth. They will say we can end war like John Lennon tried, by making “Happy Xmas” and just declaring war to be over. But for every New York Times op ed columnist who says we just need to get rid of religion to end war there is another Putin or Assad bombing civilians without comprehension. Our true peace is in Jesus Christ “that though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that we through his poverty might become rich.” At this Christmas time despite your situation, ask Jesus to bring peace to your heart and to your life.