

Peace and Joy

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Preacher: Bob Akroyd

[0 : 00] Well, good evening, everyone. It's a great privilege and pleasure to be with you tonight to share something of this magnificent message. In addition to teaching, I teach at Edinburgh Theological Seminary. For the last 30 years or so, I've been in and out of prison.

I am a prison chaplain, and my colleague David and I have done a four-part Advent series. I preached the first two Sundays of December, and he's preached today and the next Sunday.

And we decided to take four themes, four Advent themes. Peace and joy were my two. David was speaking on hope today, and next Sunday he'll speak on love.

And as I was preparing these messages, I thought Isaiah 9 would be perfect for peace, prince of peace. The increase of his government and peace would know no end.

And that Luke chapter 2 would be perfect for joy, good news of great joy that will be for all the people. But as I began to prepare these messages, I realized that both passages hit both notes so clearly and so powerfully that we are given a message of peace, predicted, a message of joy, prefigured, and then a message of peace announced and received, and a message of joy to be proclaimed.

[1 : 25] And with you, I'd like just to share something from Isaiah 9 and then look ahead to Luke chapter 2. Because what you see here, as we were told several centuries before the arrival of Jesus, the most unlikely of arrivals in the most unlikely of places with the most unlikely of outcomes.

That in Galilee, in Gentile territory, Zebulun, Naphtali, in a place that's characterized by gloom, darkness, and even the very shadow of death.

In this place, there will be light, bright light that will bring joy instead of despair, that will bring peace instead of conflict, that will bring hope to all people.

At the very beginning, we're told that the people walking in darkness have seen a great light. Those that are in the shadow, a land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. And then this theme of joy is brought before them.

Instead of gloom, they will rejoice as it was harvest time. That way, they will rejoice at the time of victory as when they were dividing the plunder. Because the contrast is drawn here.

[2 : 42] Isaiah takes them back into their history and reminds them of that time in Judges, when the Midianites, they were oppressing the people of God. And God intervened and broke the rod of the oppressor, set his people free.

Which is one of the great themes of the whole Bible. That sin brings captivity. Sin brings bondage. We heard in Genesis chapter 3, The serpent promised everything, but delivered absolutely nothing. Your eyes will be opened, you will be like God. No, their eyes were opened, they realized they were naked, and before they knew it, they were expelled from Eden. That's what the evil one offers. He offers everything, he delivers nothing. God, by contrast, offers and delivers everything that he promises. So instead of darkness, there's going to be light.

Instead of gloom, there's going to be joy. Instead of captivity and bondage, there is going to be freedom. So much so that even the very garments of war will be burnt, because war will be no more.

[3 : 52] And listen to how this arrival is described. That there is one who is described as a child. A child born, a son given. And the government will be on his shoulders.

What an image. That the government of this world will rest on the shoulders of a child, of a baby, of a son. That he will have the strength and the capacity, literally, to carry the whole world on his shoulders.

I'm sure tonight I'm speaking to people who may be carrying burdens, who may be bearing heavy weights. And those burdens trouble you. They trouble your mind.

They bother your heart. They weigh you down. And we're told of someone who has the capacity to hold what would otherwise crush us. That he can carry this whole world, its government, and its people.

That he can bear those burdens. In fact, my favorite verse in the New Testament must be Matthew chapter 11, verse 28, where the Lord Jesus has come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[5 : 04] The shoulders of Jesus are broad. He can carry the weight, the burden, the sorrow, the suffering, the grief, the anxiety that would otherwise crush us.

And we're told that he has four great titles, that he's going to be wonderful counselor. That means that he has every answer to every question. He has every solution to every problem.

There's nothing that perplexes him, nothing that causes him difficulty. Why? Because he's the God who is mighty, almighty, all-powerful, all-wisdom, all-strength.

The next image there is one of everlasting father. This theme of being part of a new family. Sin brings separation, division.

Sin divides people from people. Adam and Eve had their first argument in the garden immediately after tasting the fruit that was forbidden them. And from that time on, we see conflict.

[6 : 07] We see strife. We see nation versus nation, people versus people. But we now, through Jesus, this son, this child, we are brought into a worldwide family.

And instead of having conflict, we look upon others now as our brothers, our sisters. Why? Because we have a shared father in God and we have a shared elder brother in Jesus.

And he's described here as the prince of peace. The increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. His government will continue to grow.

And this, the 21st century, is the century that we are witnessing the growth of Jesus' kingdom like no other. The 20th century was the century where the extension of Jesus' kingdom was the greatest.

And that century will be overtaken by the 21st century. Because people from the north and people from the south, people from the east and people from the west are being brought together under the government of this son, wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

[7 : 18] And the end of this verse, it says, the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. There are many titles that are given to God. This title is equivalent to the commander-in-chief.

The commander-in-chief of the angelic armies. That what he says, he does. What he promises, he fulfills. What he offers, he always delivers.

We have so many promises that we might make and so many promises that we might receive that remain unfulfilled. Unfulfilled. So many hopes that remain unrealized.

But every promise that he makes, he has the power, he has the authority, he has the capacity, he has the resources to fulfill every promise.

And you see, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when he began to teach, this is in Mark's gospel, he began to teach, and we read in Mark chapter 4, when Jesus heard that John had been put into prison.

[8 : 23] He returned to Galilee, leaving Nazareth. He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah.

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, by way of the sea along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.

From that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. The words of promise are now words of fulfillment.

And the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Matthew says, you read it in Isaiah 9, and you now see it with your eyes and hear it with your ears. Jesus is proclaiming the kingdom is at hand.

And we respond in faith. We respond in repentance. We turn from sin. We turn from gloom and darkness. We turn from oppression and captivity.

[9 : 28] And we turn to hope. And we turn to joy. And we turn to peace. And we turn to freedom. Luke captures those scenes with the angels and the shepherds.

It's quite remarkable. In the Bible, we don't have many angelic messages. But whenever we do, they're significant. Whenever the angels are on the scene, you can guarantee that something significant is about to happen.

When the angels appeared, when the angel, first of all, singular, appeared to the shepherds, the message was this. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

But notice before the good news and before the great joy, do not be afraid. I'm told in the Bible, there are 366 occasions where the Bible tells you do not be afraid.

That means one for every day and two for a particularly scary day or a leap year. But 366 times, now that seems to say to me that we must live in a scary world.

[10:40] If we're told do not be afraid, something must be frightening. Something must be fearful. Do not be afraid. Why? Good news, great joy that will be for all the people.

This note of joy that was predicted in Isaiah is now accomplished and achieved in the arrival of Jesus. The one whose government, the government of the world is on his shoulders.

A child born, a son given. Good news. Great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, Bethlehem, a savior has been born to you.

He is Christ. He's Messiah. He is the anointed one, the prophet and the priest and the king, the Lord. And this will be a sign to you.

You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Not surprisingly, the shepherds were terrified. This angelic vision created fear and the angel dispelled the fear.

[11:42] Do not be afraid. But then if that wasn't enough, suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

Good news. Great joy. Peace on earth. Good will to men. The angelic host fills the sky with light, fills the sky with song, fills the sky with peace.

Peace on earth. And this evening, that opening video, there is much that causes us distress, much that causes us care and concern.

Much of this world is not characterized by peace. Many human lives are not characterized by joy. Many individuals, families, communities are beset with strife, with hunger, with division.

And Jesus has come to proclaim light in darkness, joy instead of gloom, peace instead of distress, and hope in the place of despair.

[12:57] And I'd like you to consider what the shepherds do. It's intriguing because in the ancient world, shepherds were not allowed to give testimony in a court of law. They were considered to be unreliable.

They were not trustworthy. And yet the angels appeared to these people. Time and again, outsiders are brought in. Time and again, those that are on the periphery of the culture, of the society, are now at the center of the story.

And maybe sometimes you feel like you might be on the edge, on the periphery, not at the center. And maybe God has a way of using those on the edge as demonstrations of his power, of his authority, that he speaks to the shepherds who culturally speaking are nobodies, but he gives them the honor of being the first evangelists.

Because the shepherds do two things. They go. Basically, the message the shepherds say to each other, let's go and see. And I would encourage you, if you're not yet a follower of Jesus, don't take my word for it.

Don't take the words of the carols that we've sung or even the words that we've read. See for yourself. See for yourself who this Jesus is. See for yourself what he has come to do.

[14:19] See for yourself whether these promises have actually been fulfilled in him. Listen to the testimonies of other people. Listen to the stories of lives changed and transformed.

See for yourself. Don't take my word. Go and see. But then we're told that when the shepherds went and saw for themselves, they found out that it was just as had been told to them.

The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told. Verse 17 says, when they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

Go and see. Go and tell. See for yourself. And if you already know this Jesus, tell other people. Point people in his direction.

You might not be able to answer people's questions. You certainly won't be able to solve people's problems. But you can say, I know someone who can. I know someone who can answer your questions.

[15 : 30] I know someone who can solve your problems. I know someone who can change your circumstances. Go and see. And then go and tell. Tell what you have seen.

Tell what you have experienced. Point people in the direction of Jesus. That's the best gift you could give anyone at Christmas time, New Year, or any time of the year.

The songs that we sing are filled with joy. The message that we hear is filled with peace. And it's a message that's worthy of being shared. Jesus has come on a mission.

He's come on a mission to seek and to save. And he brings people like us along with him. Ordinary people who have an extraordinary message about an extraordinary Savior who has done extraordinary things.

You might be very ordinary, but when you point people to Jesus, you are part of something out of this world. The Savior of the world who has come down to bring joy, to bring peace, to bring hope, and to bring love.

[16 : 39] So may God bless his word to each of our hearts. Come and see and go and tell. God bless you He'll be right tipos and to can't go and tell him to ride your hope, and I'll be right Leuph that way to ■■en2020.