



After I preached my last sermon on love, one of my children said to me that my definition of love didn't make sense. If you weren't there for the sermon, or if you forgot, I said that love cannot simply be a strong feeling for something because we can have strong feelings but not actually be committed and caring. On the flipside, love cannot simply mean "strong commitment" because you can be committed to something and not love. I re-explained this, and then said, it's kind of like wings on a plane. You need to have both. If you are missing one of the wings, the plan isn't going to fly! So, commitment and desire go together with love.

The same is true for the word we're looking at today on our fourth week of Advent. We've looked at hope, love, joy, and now we see God's teaching on Peace, and how Jesus truly is the fulness of peace. Now, what do you think peace means? Well, maybe like with the word "love," you might think only in terms of internal feelings of serenity. Let's test your view of peace for a moment by looking at a specific Bible passage: ⁶ **do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.** ⁷ **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** ¹

As I grew up, my understanding of these verses was that if I had any anxiety, or if I was unsure about something, I should pray and if I got a certain feeling of peace, then that was God's answer to me about whether or not I should do it. Have you ever heard someone say, "I just don't have a peace about it?" That may be legitimate in certain circumstances. But I think that phrase has been abused. Think about this a little more. What if Moses, after God told him to go back to Egypt, said, "I just don't have a peace about it?" Was a feeling of peace to trump God's clear command? No. Think about Jesus crying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He didn't say, "I don't feel a peace about it so I won't go to the cross." Instead, he said, "Nevertheless, let your will be done." Do you praise God that Jesus endured to the cross even though the feelings of serenity weren't there?

As we look at just Moses and Jesus, we see that peace can't simply mean feelings of serenity and calm. How many times in your life have you know God was calling you to do something that might stir up difficulty and maybe even pain? How many of you are parents? What about a job transition? What about talking to someone about trusting in Christ?

Peace cannot only mean internal feelings of serenity. There has to be more. We need a more sturdy foundation because that definition can't handle real life. So, let me give you the definition of the most common Hebrew word for peace. You have probably heard the word before. It's the word "Shalom." To this day, Jews will greet one another with this word. Shalom can be translated as, **wholeness**,

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Php 4:5–7.

“completeness, soundness, welfare, peace.”² One Bible dictionary says, “In one form or another the notions of wholeness, health, and completeness inform all the variants of the word. Peace is not, then, simply a negative, the absence of war. Peace is a positive notion. . .”³

There’s a sense in which the Bible’s definition of peace is similar to its definition of love. It includes an internal element of “soundness,” but there’s a broader perspective of having all the blessings of God – being complete and not fractured in every way, shape, and form. To add to this, peace isn’t only individualistic. It’s communal. Meaning, there’s no fracturing between communities and countries. And there’s no fracturing between us and God. On the positive, there’s wholeness and wellbeing in all arenas of life.

As I describe this word for peace, I want to give you the main idea of the sermon today: **God’s peace is the atmosphere God designs for his people to live in. The incarnate Jesus is the One who brings God’s peace.**

We’ll start by emphasizing the first sentence. Let’s walk through the Old Testament to see God’s design for us to experience his peace. You see, God designed for people to live wholly – mind, soul, body, heart. But, as I’ve commented on in the previous Advent sermons, Adam and Eve’s rebellion led to a fracturing of everything. Shalom was lost. There was no welfare. There was no soundness. There was no completeness. As we journey through Genesis, we get to a scenario where I think people are trying to create perfect peace. It’s the story of the Tower of Babel. We’re told they are unified in one language, and then that they want to build a tower to Heaven. They depend on themselves and think that they can have a perfect culture by trusting and depending on their own strength and power. But humans will never experience peace with one another and peace with God by depending on ourselves. We need God’s forgiveness, not greater willpower. And so, we’re told that God changes the languages and separates the people. More fracturing, even less wholeness, health and completeness. Why? Because humanity needs God’s forgiveness and grace more than anything else. And humanity needs the seed of the woman to come to reconcile us to God so we have peace with him and then with one another.

As we continue on in Genesis, we arrive at another story that gives us anticipation for a future society that will be filled with peace. After God calls Abram, we hear of a scenario where Abram saves his nephew, along with others, and Abram comes into contact with a mysterious King and Priest named Melchizedek. Now, Psalm 110:4 prophecies of the serpent crusher: “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”⁴ It’s very important we understand this mysterious Melchizedek. He’s King and Priest of Salem. As Priest, he offers worship to the Lord and leads people to worship God. As King, he rules a people. And the city he rules over is Salem. The word Salem is associated with the word Shalom, and is translated Peace. Melchizedek is the King of Peace. Abraham gives an offering to Melchizedek. And, as you engage with this short story, you are left with a longing for peace. Unlike Babel. Unlike Sodom and Gomorrah. We want Salem. We’re made for Salem.

² Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, [*Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*](#) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1022.

³ Joseph P. Healey, [*“Peace: Old Testament,”*](#) ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 206.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 110:4.

God made us to live in peace, and the Bible's teaching affirms this. Think about it. What ends up becoming the capital of Israel? Jerusalem. It's the very city Melchizedek was from. It simply means "City of Salem." The city of peace.

But it's easy to name a city "Peace." Is there actual peace there? That's like the city of Philadelphia. It means "city of brotherly love," and yet there's crime and areas where people don't act like family. Is a city of peace just a dream or will there actually be peace on earth someday?

Well, as we move into Exodus, we get to chapters where God is giving his law to the people he rescued out of Egypt. He's drawing them towards Israel, and as he gives them laws, he consistently uses the word "peace." In fact, in Exodus 21-22, he uses the word "Shalom" 14 times. It's translated in various ways: make it good, surely pay, make full restitution, restore. But the idea is that God designs for the people to live with wholeness in body, mind, spirit, and resources.

When we see this, we realize God wants to populate his City of Peace with people of peace. Yet, again and again, we find the Israelites rebelling against God. They fail to understand that they will only know peace when they are at peace with God. But God would remind them over and over again. The High Priestly blessing was to remind them of this. In Numbers 6:24-26, we read what Aaron was commanded to state over the people: **The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.**⁵ Each statement is combined with the word "and" to show that they're each referring to one thing. So, God blessing is the same as keeping you. He won't turn you away. The Lord making his face to shine upon you is because gracious to you. The Lord lifting up his countenance gives peace. So, we have the blessing stating that God will keep us, give us grace, and give us peace. God designs to have a peace who are given grace and peace – who will be kept by him forever. And, as we've seen, he designs for these people to have a home in the City of Peace.

Does this almost sound too good to be true? I genuinely long for an unbroken world. I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired. I hate hearing news about how people are murdered or how our government is making laws that simply affirm human sinfulness. Hearing about children being taken out of homes because parents are abusive or hearing about human trafficking burden me deeply, and I yearn for a perfect place. The older I get, the more I long for my eternal home. I want to live in the City of Peace and not fear anything wrong. I want to live in the City of Peace, and know that there is only wholeness and completeness and perfection to the uttermost. Do you feel it? Even in this Christmas season, where we are supposed to have all the internal, good, fuzzy feelings, we know there's still sorrow and pain.

As we look back at the Scriptures again, it seems as though, for the most part, the people of Israel did not genuinely trust the Lord for his peace. Eventually, God instituted Kings in Israel. Then Jerusalem becomes the capital. David reign sees many people worshipping the Lord, and under Solomon, Shalom is experienced to the greatest degree – a powerful economy, minimal to no war, and the Temple of God is built. God descends on that Temple with a visible display of smoke and reveals he's with the people. Is Solomon the Serpent-Crusher? Is he the seed of the woman who is a priest after the order of Melchizedek? No. Solomon dishonors the Lord through gaining peace on his own terms – through many many marriages. Solomon's heart was turned from complete faithfulness to God, and then the Kingdom is divided and we have Israel and Judah with their own kings.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Nu 6:24–26.

At this point in Israel's history, you could think, "Well, God tried. I guess peace just won't happen." But God never just tries. He always accomplishes what he sets out to do. So, he hasn't given up on his mission to give people peace and bring them to the City of Peace. But many people of Israel and Judah seem to have given up on God. Jeremiah speaks of people in his day, speaking on behalf of God, saying, **"everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. Were they shamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush."**⁶

People have turned inward to themselves. They've trusted their own ways instead of trusting in the Lord. God says the prophet and priest have dealt lightly with the wounds of God's people. Why? Because instead of confronting the sin and pointing people to their need for the Lord, they say "Peace, peace," meaning, they're saying, "All is well! You're doing fine. It's ok." Isn't that what so many in our day say, too? I think some of the greatest cultural prophets of today are from Hollywood. And the movies and shows today constantly echo the refrain of "believe in yourself," because you are good. You don't need anything outside of yourself. Is that true? No. Peace is not found within. You don't heal the wound of sinfulness by lying to people and trusting self. Thankfully God didn't give up on his plan.

When we enter Isaiah 9, we read this in verse 6: **For to us a child is born, to us a 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.**⁷

A child will be born who will be the Prince of Peace, and he will have a government of eternal peace. The Lord is zealous for this! Oh praise God he's zealous for people to experience his peace. Shouldn't that astound us right now? God is zealous that we, who have rebelled against him and chosen our own selfishness and pride, experience eternal peace. Truly, God's peace is the atmosphere God designs for his people to live in.

Now, let's see how **The incarnate Jesus is the One who brings God's peace.** What does incarnate mean? It means "in the flesh." God didn't just stay in Heaven, but God the Son came and took on human flesh. Why? Because Adam was a failed ruler and representative of humanity. We need a new ruler and representative who will not bring death, but who will destroy death and sin, and will bring peace. Isaiah prophecies that this new representative will come as a child into the world. And then we get to Luke 2:11-14, a popularly read passage at Christmastime: ¹¹**For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.** ¹²**And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.** ¹³**And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"**⁸

A baby is the Savior, and peace has come! True peace. How has peace come? Because, according to Hebrews, Jesus is the priest of the order of Melchizedek. He's not only king. He's priest. But Jesus didn't simply accept sacrifices from others, Jesus sacrificed himself. He did this to take the punishment sinners

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Je 6:13–15.

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 9:6–7.

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 2:11–14.

deserved. He took the brokenness and sinfulness of humanity in full degree, and experienced the judgment deserved. But then through his sacrifice, God directed all the wrath to Christ for anyone who would turn from their sins and trust Jesus. Do you hear that? That means, Jesus becomes people's peace! If you have trusted in Jesus, you are at peace with God. Whether you feel it or not today, you are at peace with God if you have trusted in Christ! That's a reality, a statement of fact! Have you trusted in Christ? Do you have peace with God? If you have peace with God, then you are on your way to the city of peace! Did you know that?

In John 14, Jesus tells his disciples that he's going to leave, and he's going to prepare a place for them. In the midst of this conversation, he says this: **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.**⁹ As he's creating the place of peace, he gives us peace. What is this peace? Is it just a feeling of inner calm? No. Sometimes we'll feel that, sometimes we won't. Rather, this Greek word is a military term of peace. We, who were once enemies of God and his Kingdom, are now at peace with God. Jesus has given all of his followers *peace*. That should shape our thinking, our actions, and our feelings, shouldn't it? Jesus has given us peace. So, whether we go through pain or pleasures in this life, we ought to remind ourselves of the eternal peace we have. And then, we ought to remind ourselves that we're on our way to the eternal Kingdom of Peace – a government that will never go away.

I hope you see how Jesus' first advent provides encouragement to look forward to his second advent! If I may, indulge me to read from Revelation 21. The apostle John has a vision of what's going to happen in the future: **² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."**¹⁰

The New Jerusalem is the City of Peace that we who are at peace with God will live in. No more mourning, death, crying or pain. Only peace forever and always. Praise God that he's zealous for our peace! He himself is our peace.

So, as we come into the final week before Christmas and you're trying to wrap presents (or buy the final presents), and then you're feeling stressed because you can't do everything you want or make all the food that everyone wants – remember the Prince of Peace. **As we come to Christmas Day, and you think about the sorrows of this past year or contemplate what could come, remember the Prince of Peace. God has done all to reconcile you to him. As we listen to sad news in the days and weeks to come, let Christmas remind us of the Prince of Peace who will put an end to all brokenness and bring wholeness. God's peace is the atmosphere God designs for his people to live in. The incarnate Jesus is the One who brought God's peace and is bringing it in full measure one day.**

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 14:27.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Re 21:2–4.