

23rd December 2020 – Jesus, Prince of Peace – Wednesday Prayer Meeting

As we come together, today is our final meeting before Christmas. We have already done the Christmas Advent Retreat. What I have to say now is I have nothing more to say and finish the book. But preaching has to go on, worship has to go on. Today we prepare for the 25th which is just 2 days away. Today what I thought was to share with you the message of peace. The theme is: Jesus, Prince of Peace. I think that this theme seems to be the most appropriate linked together with darkness and light. So when there is darkness like we are experiencing today worldwide, the light that is coming in can be described as the peace that is brought to us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

I had to write this article about Christmas and when I was writing this article which goes to a secular news column, I was saying if someone had written in January 2020 about the events that have unfurled up to December 2020, and said what was going to happen and explained the virus and about lockdowns, about airports closing, about the variants of the virus, about people dying, we would have called them doomsday prophets and we would have said, "Be serious. Be a realist. Those things don't happen." But when you look back at the end of 2020, even worse things than we can imagine have taken place.

So I thought the theme of peace is the most appropriate theme we can share. Tonight let me start from the Old Testament. We look at peace in the scripture in the Old Testament and then we come to the New Testament, Jesus and peace in our own lives, right in the heart of the pandemic.

Isaiah 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 Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

That's how the title 'Prince of Peace' has been given to Jesus. In Isaiah 9 we have this prophecy about the coming Messiah. Bible scholars will tell us this is not directly about Jesus but about the son that that king was going to have. All the time Biblical prophecy has two meanings. One is the immediate application but second is the eternal application that God works through the world. We can say the immediate application would have been for the son of the king, giving assurance that the kingdom will be protected. But the long-term implication is the Prince of Peace is coming. He is the One who will really offer peace to the whole world.

Now we go to the New Testament. Now we have the angels. I preached about the angels last week in the retreat. The angels got their landings mixed up and they landed in another airport. They landed in the fields of the shepherds instead of the chief priests, but look at what the angels said:

Luke 2:11-12

Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

On Saturday I told you about a baby wrapped in cloths, and how the sheep who were bred to be offered in sacrifice at the temple, immediately when they were born they were wrapped in swaddling cloths to make sure there is no blemish on their skin. Therefore that sheep was offered in the temple as sacrifice. It's so prophetic that Jesus himself sent as the sacrifice, as the Lamb of God is wrapped in this cloth and in the same place where the temple sheep were bred and kept.

When I was preaching yesterday I realized that when we say that they were pushed around and buffeted around by the winds around them, one guy took a decision, Caesar Augustus gets up one morning and has an idea to count how many people and then he tells Quirinius to do this and there is a lot of upheaval. It looks as if big people make great decisions and small people are caught. But when I was praying about this only I realized that it's the other way around. What is happening? God is moving Quirinius, God is moving Caesar Augustus, God is moving the Roman Empire to get His Son born in Bethlehem, in that stable as the Lamb that was going to be sacrificed for the whole world.

It's earth shaking when I was praying about it. It's like in the ancient times they said the sun was turning around the earth. In fact when Galileo found that in fact the earth was turning around the sun and he whispered it to a few people, they said if you tell this you're going to get killed for disputing this accepted fact. So he didn't tell anybody because he knew that he will be killed for that, but in his last will he wrote it. After his death they couldn't kill him again, otherwise they would have resuscitated him and killed him again. He said, actually the earth goes around the sun and not the sun around the earth. Actually, if you look at human psychology, we start from that point where we think that everything revolves around us. Have you seen a baby? The baby imagines that the whole world revolves around them, and for some time it happens. Our timetables are changed and everything changes and the whole world revolves around. But little by little, you begin to learn that the world is bigger than you and you begin to realise that it was not that Jesus was a victim of the great powers of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was a part of a play that God was staging to make sure that His Son is born in Bethlehem in the stable as a sacrifice for the world. If you take that light and turn it on ourselves, you will see, God is moving heaven and earth for you and for me. That I think is a tremendous truth we can pray about as we come to the Lord this Christmas. But it doesn't finish there:

Luke 2:13-14

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests."

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests. Only now I'm having a glimpse of this. I'm thinking, when you see the power and the glory of God in the heavens and then you know that God's favour rests on you, you realise that in actual fact, you are not being moved by incidents, you are not being moved by heaven and earth, but heaven and earth and incidents are being moved by God for you. That's the peace on those on whom His favour rests.

Let the tubelights come on as I say this. With a tube light the starter kicks while it is dark and suddenly the light comes on. Some people are also like tubelights. I have a younger brother who when we were small we used to go to the film hall and nobody wants to sit next to him because after the joke has passed, 2-3 minutes later he connects and laughs loud where he shouldn't laugh, and everyone in the film hall goes "Shhh!" That's what you mean by a tube light.

For us also, when you see the glory of God in heaven, suddenly the lights come on and you realised it's not that God is maneuvering you through events but in actual fact, He is using events to take you to the place where you should be in His great plan. The moment you realize that, peace is the result that will happen in our hearts.

Luke 2:29

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace."

Simeon has received a revelation and he says, "Now I can go in peace." Why is that?

Luke 2:30-31

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations...

The light dawned on Simeon. Suddenly he realised God was orchestrating a massive move upon the earth, and the center of it was this infant. He was going to be the center of the shift of the world. When he realized he said, "I'm at peace. No one can stop what God is doing."

Now you begin to realise the sense of peace that seems to be filling the scripture, and the shift we need to have to really enjoy that peace. So peace didn't mean this too much in the Old Testament. The Old Testament peace and our peace are very similar.

One main meaning of peace is, many people saw peace as the absence of war.

Joshua 14:15

(Hebron used to be called Kiriath Arba after Arba, who was the greatest man among the Anakites.) Then the land had rest from war.

Absence of war is peace. That's the peace that a lot of people are thinking about. The second kind of peace is peace as security from enemies.

2 Kings 20:19

"The word of the Lord you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "Will be not be peace and security in my lifetime?"

Peace is the security of your borders. We can say it in modern terms. Peace is when you have enough money in your bank account, you have a secure home, you have stuff you can deal with, you have a profession that is stable and things are in place and we can praise God also, and say, "Thank God He has given me a peaceful life." That kind of peace only has been shattered in 2020, because normalcy has been shattered, and the whole world is in upheaval. Then only you begin to realise our peace has been depending on circumstances, on people, on our bank accounts, on our health, on so many other factors. If any one of them changes immediately we lose our peace. That's why so many people are unhappy in the world today.

When you read the accounts of the world and what's happening, "Most people are saying we just want to go back to our normal life. We want to have a peaceful life." This Christmas, is there a peace beyond the borders of a controlled, normal environment? That's the peace I would really like to talk to you about.

Luke 1:79 talks about John the Baptist and it is said here beautifully the mission of John the Baptist:

Luke 1:79

...to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

I thought looking at these words can be really beautiful. "To shine on those living in darkness..." I think calling this time darkness is pretty appropriate. The virus turns out to be like a demon. When you're able to handle one part of it, it mutates into something else. It is said in Taiwan after 128 days from society has emerged another patient. They managed to keep it at bay for 128 days. Sydney which hosted the cricket matches and everyone was without a mask because they had beaten the virus is in lockdown this week once again.

The next word is even more appropriate. "Shadow of death..." Aren't we in the shadow of death? You can always justify yourself and say, "It's not me. It's old people, it's the people with high blood pressure, somebody with diabetes, they will die and not me." Today in our country, a 15 year old boy has died of Covid. Then you begin to realise that this spreads across. "To shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the path of peace." Right in the middle of the darkness, peace comes. Right in the middle of the threat of death is the gift of peace that God brings into our world.

Tonight I want to offer that to you this Christmas. We can have peaceful Christmas with peaceful music, peaceful decorations, our taste buds enjoying it, our friends coming together, our relations and enjoying the time of peace. When all that is shattered, we have the word coming from Luke 1:79. It says this will shine on those in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace -- a peace that is beyond circumstances.

This peace does not begin with an event. It begins with a person. That's the key. When I started I told you, it's not that God guides you through events. God orchestrates events for you, a person. Tonight I want to offer you a second great truth: Peace is not coming through events. It's coming through a person. If you thought peace came through events by now you have lost your peace. If you have lost your peace, great! Why is that? Because you are much closer now to find real peace - the peace that was originally intended for us when we were created.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

What do you mean by the peace the world gives? It depends on circumstances: absence of war, security, guarantee of the future, perfect health, good relationships. When we look at God and we pray to God, one we ask for God for all of these because we think peace will come when everything is in right place. Then we thank God for all of this. "Thank you Lord, you gave me back my financial security, I thank you. Thank you Lord, you taught so-and-so a lesson and now at least we have peace." How we are caught up in this dimension of an external peace! But see what Jesus says: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. It's a different kind of peace that's coming to us this Christmas.

John 14:27 continued

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

I'm asking you tonight, what are the two things that happen inside us? On one hand we have a troubled heart, on the other hand we are afraid. We don't know what will happen, we don't know what will take place, we have fears moving inside of us. Jesus is saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Those days when I used to read this text I used to get angry with Jesus sometimes. Easy for Him to say! I'm the one who is facing the problem. I'm the one who is going through the struggle. I'm the one who is having the

issue. How can you say do not let your hearts be troubled? Take away the troublemaker and I'll have peace. Take away this problem and I'll have peace. Take away this issue and I'll have peace, I used to tell the Lord.

But the Lord is telling us, "When you have me with you, you can be assured that everything is working together for your good. That's why peace is not an event, peace is not a circumstance, peace is not a situation. Peace is a person. Who is that person? Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and alive. Having Him is to have peace.

I have met people in my lifetime. So when I say in my lifetime it's a long time. I have met people who have everything. Money, privileges and everything but peace. They have everything but peace. But we have also met people who have nothing, but have peace. They have nothing. They have no financial security, they have no future structures, they have no answers to many of the issues but they have one thing -- they have peace. Why? Because they have found Him.

Tonight our challenge is peace in the heart of the Covid crisis. Peace in the heart of our sicknesses. Peace in the heart of financial struggles. Peace in the heart of relationship pains. Why? Because we have Him. Tonight I want to tell you, the moment you have it, the whole world turns upside down. It is not that hHee is leading you through these events avoiding this problem and avoiding that problem. The whole thing turns upside down. Every event is orchestrated and brought together by this Lord of the universe to make sure that I am blessed.

In the first sermon of Peter, Peter said that in the Acts of the Apostles. He said, "You together with the wicked men put him to death according to the foreordained plan of God." Put to death by the foreordained plan of God. In other words, Pilate thought he was ruling the situation, the high priest thought they had control, those who crucified him thought but God was moving in those events, bringing it together to make sure that Jesus is the Risen Lord of the universe and history itself. The moment you realize this, that He is the God of history and the God of the universe, the gift we will have is absolute, internal peace. The One in charge of the universe is putting it all together for the higher plan.

I want to explain this through our great St. Paul. How does this work? St. Paul is not as simple as the Acts of the Apostles or the gospels. But we can't miss him because he is too valuable to miss. So you have to bear with me a little bit as I explain a little concept. You need to understand the peace of God as St. Paul explains it. He gives us the very root of peace. Where do you find peace?

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith...

Justified through faith. We believed in Jesus. We believed that His blood forgave us our sins. We believed that He died and rose for us. When I believed this truth I was connected with God by Jesus Christ -- justified through faith. Now we are connected with God. How did we get a connection with God? I believed in who Jesus is, that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Saviour. I believed in Jesus. I believed His blood forgives me my sin. I believed His resurrection brings me the power of the Holy Spirit. The moment I believe this, I'm connected with God. You're just not connected because you have a God and I'm going to think about God, I'm thinking of being connected to the whole universe. Of course you can do that, but we have this clear connection. We have a mighty nuclear power house and you are the house. The power base is out there.

How do you make a connection? You have to get your wire connected to the wire that is coming from the nuclear plant. How do you connect it? You believe in the Connector - the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every time I sit to prayer I have to do that. I connect with Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, You came into the world for me. You gave your life for me. By your blood I am forgiven and reconciled with God, and you have filled me with your Holy Spirit." Connected. The moment you are connected, you have something.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...

We have peace with God! Forgiven, loved, favoured, God smiling on me. That's where peace originates. Covid only exposes the problem inside us. It's not creating the problem. Otherwise we would have played a few cricket matches, gone on a few trips, gone abroad, enjoyed with our friends, had a singsong, got drunk and not dealt with the problems inside us. We would have covered it up, anaesthetised it, numbed, forgotten. We have distracted ourselves. Go to the New Year's dance and dance through to the dawn. But now no dance, no going, no trips, no nothing. In that emptiness what is actually inside us is being exposed. It's nothing new that is coming in. That is that we are not at peace with God. We have covered it up with parties, we have covered it up with entertainment, we have covered it up with trips, we have covered it up by going with friends, we have covered it up with dances, we have covered it up by feasting and hosting and running around doing a thousand things. The question could have waited until we were old and seated in a rocking chair with nothing to do. Then I would have had to face that question. Thank God Covid has brought that question to us here and now today.

Here is the answer: If you connect through Jesus to our God, immediately in the middle of crisis, in the land that is covered in darkness, in the moment of utter confusion, we have the great gift of the peace of God.

Romans 5:2

...through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand...

In other words, the moment you connect with God believing that Jesus came for me, that Jesus died for me, that when I come to Him, His blood washes me of my sin and that I connected through Jesus with God the Father and the Holy Spirit is now moving through me, I stand in grace. I'm enjoying fullness.

Romans 5:2 continued

...and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

When you are connected with God through Jesus and that grace is flowing through you, you have a little taste of the glory that is waiting for you. Therefore death is not a terrifying prospect. Covid is not the end. Sickness is not the doom of our existence. It's only a doorway into the fullness of His glory. If you're already connected with God, if you're already reconciled with God, if you're already having His Spirit moving in your life and His grace in your heart, you are already experiencing that taste of glory, and you are given an assurance that you will have more of this as you come into My heart.

That's how we have peace in the midst of a crisis. We have the person of Jesus with us. What is He doing? He is reconciling us with the Father, cleansing us of our brokenness, connecting us with the power of the

Holy Spirit and we are enjoying the glory that only we would have had fully in heaven. Because of that, in the middle of crisis, great peace. But then the crisis does something more:

Romans 5:3

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings...

If you take him to a psychologist today they will say he is sick and this guy has lost his reality. He is saying we glory in our sufferings. Why on earth would you glory in your sufferings?

Romans 5:3 continued

...because we know that suffering produces perseverance...

If you are connected to God and you walk with Him through events, I can tell you from experience, the most difficult events only make you stronger, more mature and more deeper than anyone else. Why is that? Because you have Him walking with you. But if you don't have Him, even the best events destroy you. Isn't it the love of self indulgent parents that destroy their children? They gave them everything except the equipment to handle life. So we love them but in our love we destroyed them. But here is the beautiful key: As you walk in connection with God, even Covid, even darkness, even the restraints and constraints we are dealing with will only make us stronger.

Romans 5:4

...perseverance, character; and character, hope.

If you have Jesus and you have a right relationship with Him and with the Father through the Holy Spirit, the time of Covid, the time of darkness, the time of all these struggles is also the time of favour. It is in this time that things will grow inside of us so rich, so deep that would not have happened if you hadn't gone through that crisis. The Prince of Peace is coming. Connected with Him, right relationship with Him, everything falls into place. This is Christmas at the deepest level.

Romans 5:5

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Our hope will not disappoint us because right in the middle of this struggle the Prince of Peace is doing something. What is He doing? God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Like I said earlier, some months ago, when you come to Jesus and you are washed in His blood, believing in His love and you surrender to Him as Saviour and Lord, He comes to live inside of us. The Prince of Peace has come to live inside of us. He connects us directly with the Father. The Father and He are communing and this communion between the Father and the Son which is never-ending, everlasting, through the Holy Spirit begins to happen through us.

In the middle of darkness we have the Holy Spirit moving and bringing us strength. In the middle of insecurity we have the Holy Spirit moving and making us strong. In the middle of emptiness we have the fullness of the Holy Spirit moving and making us transformational. Suddenly, we become a blessing for the whole world around us.

Let the Prince of Peace come into our hearts this Christmas. Let Him have the rightful place inside of us. Let Him commune with the Father. Let the energy of God the Father and His Son flow through us right in the middle of the darkness and let the anointing of the Holy Spirit take us through it all, not just survival, not just dealing and sustained, but victorious, transformational, turning it all into a blessing.

Here is the key that the Lord is offering us tonight. I want to tell you about dealing with other people as we finish:

Ephesians 4:1

As a prisoner for the Lord...

He is writing from prison! We are in a Covid prison. He is in a real prison. He has been sentenced to death and he never came out of that prison. Two years in jail and then he was executed.

Ephesians 4:1

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

What is a life worthy of the calling? You have been chosen to carry God in your life. You have Jesus living inside you, you have a direct connection with God the Father and you have the Holy Spirit's energy moving in your life. Because of that, remember to remain faithful to that great dignity that God has given you. The Prime Minister didn't give you that dignity, the President didn't give you that dignity, the principal didn't give you that dignity, the judge didn't give you that dignity. Who gave it to you? God gave it to you. You are a prisoner of that dignity. What do you do?

Ephesians 4:2

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

When we are children we had many dogs in our house and sometimes dogs were competing. One dog was competing for the attention of one of our family members with another dog. So when they passed each other they showed their teeth to each other. That was the way of telling them what they thought of the other one. I've seen that same kind of behaviour among humans. You pass each other and your face shows the kind of feeling you have, sneering, the eyes will show it, the upper lip will show it, the throwing of your hands will show it. We can't deal with them and we can't bear them.

At Christmas, because we have Jesus living inside us, connecting us to the Father and the energy of the Holy Spirit moving through us, the Lord is inviting us to share this peace with them. Of course we can say, "Lord, you don't know who is in my home. You don't know my relations. If you know my relations even you would be angry with them! Specially my in-laws. If you know them even you won't be able to forgive them." But we are not being asked to look for good quality and bless them for that. We looked at it on the third day beautifully in the retreat.

For the peace of Jesus we have to forgive the world. For the resurrection of Jesus we have to forgive the world. You saw that they were insensitive to this. I read you the text where Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Even without changing the worst they have added to that and they shared his clothes among themselves. In other words, even as he forgave them it didn't touch them. But it transformed Jesus.

Let's do it this Christmas. They may sneer, they may reject it, they may judge us, they may think we are weak but we do it anyway. If they don't accept it, we deal with it with God. But if they do accept it, it's the mercy of God coming into their lives this Christmas, like it came to the thief who was hanging next to Jesus. If they reject you take it from His hands and give it back to Jesus. Let His peace guard your hearts. Rejoice in the rejection, rejoice in the judgment, rejoice in the barb, rejoice in the hard words. Rejoice because the kingdom of heaven is yours.

If you seek that peace, everything else falls together. I was looking at this message and I had preached it a few years ago. So if I also can't remember it I'm sure you can't remember it either so I decided to preach it today after four years. I saw this note I had made of a saint. His name was St. Sabas. St. Sabas was from the 4th century and it's a beautiful story. He was a son of an army commissioned officer who didn't want him, so he left him with an uncle and took his mother also and went off. He was raised by a cruel uncle and he ran away at the age of 10. In today's world it's enough to write a book and make a bestseller -- how I was rejected by my parents, sob, sob, sob and you write the book and be the bestseller. What happened was, he had no refuge whatsoever he ended up in a monastery. At the age of 20 he had a divine encounter.

Terrible things can happen in our life. People can treat us unfairly but if it leads us to Jesus, all that is put together to become a blessing. It is there that he met a great saint of God who lived in absolute silence. St. Sabas decided to remain in silence, living in the peace of God. They didn't allow him to live all 7 days in silence so he lived 5 days in silence, 2 days he took baskets and went and sold in the village. But when the saint died, St. Sabas went into total silence for many years. But people heard that a great monk living in absolute silence had great wisdom in his life. People came from all over the world.

When I took this upside down I realised, God made him ready and brought people to him. Then he had to give the wisdom that he had found in his silence and he shared. They went and told other people and more people came. In the end, he was made the chief monk of Palestine. He decided on emperors. He had the greatest impact in the 5th century of the Church and he died at the age of 91, used mightily by God in his lifetime.

What I can tell you is, if you find Him inside you, you will also find His plan, His purpose, everything put together. Remember the good news that is coming this Christmas: that even the stars were moved for the life of His Son. The emperors were moved for the life of His Son. That will bring absolute peace. God is moving heaven and earth to make sure that His plan for your life will bear fruit. But it just won't happen. You also have to accept Him into your life. Tonight let's make that decision: I want the Prince of Peace to rule over my life this Christmas and lead me.