

**True Peace** - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **Isaiah 11:1-16** (#487)

**Introduction:** “Peace on earth, goodwill towards men.” You’ve heard that phrase in numerous Christmas carols throughout the ages, from It Came Upon a Midnight Clear to I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day. Yet, as good as Christmas carols are, these words were actually inspired by the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2: an angelic choir appears immediately after an appearance to the shepherds, and this choir belts out: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

In a world that is so broken by sin; in a nation that is so divided along every fault-line possible, what would it look like to live in a land where glorifying God is the highest and greatest value? Where His renown is the talk of the news and the topic in the checkout lines? What would it be like to have peace – not just the absence of war or strife, but real peace that is something to be enjoyed? This morning, we have the privilege of seeing exactly that picture applied to God’s people. Where? In **Isaiah 11** of all places. If you’ve been tracking along with our series, Isaiah might seem to be a bit unlikely: so far, most of the pictures have been about the judgment that is coming, even upon the people of God. True, each of those judgments is balanced out by reminders of how God loves and will ultimately rescue His people, but most folks don’t tend to see Isaiah as the place to go to for hope about everlasting peace. We should though, and our verses this morning will show us why. In **Isaiah 11**, we’ll see three pictures: first, we’ll learn something of the character and actions of the Peacemaker; second, we’ll see one snapshot of what peace on earth consists of; and finally, we’ll conclude our time in this chapter by seeing what peace amongst men looks like.

**11:1-5** Part one: the Peacemaker. Or, for those of you who’ve seen a few too many Westerns and immediately think of a revolver manufactured by Colt, perhaps a better title would be the “Peace-giver”!

This whole “stump” thing has come up before, hasn’t it? Back in **chapter 6**, the picture was of the coming judgment of God, and yet how that judgment had a

purpose that wasn't simply to destroy, but also to provide for a coming rescue, a "holy seed" as it was called there. In between, we've learned that the holy seed is the Messiah, who the Scriptures identify as Jesus Christ.

Here in **chapter 11**, we read of the shoot coming forth from the stump, identified specifically as the stump of Jesse. If that doesn't ring any bells, then it might help to remember that Jesse was the father of David, and Luke – in **Acts 13** – identifies Jesus as being in the line of David, who was the son of Jesse. All that to say we're talking about Jesus here, the Messiah, the Promised King who – from Isaiah and his listeners' perspective – was still yet to come for the first time. And who – from our perspective – will be returning to rule and reign over His kingdom here on earth.

What do we learn about the Peace-giver? First, He is filled with the Lord's Spirit. Which is to say, He is fully and entirely God. The king that was to be looked for wasn't simply another David, but a better David. And not just a better earthly version of David, but one who was better spiritually as well. Perfect, even.

One of our dangers these days is that we've lost perspective on how sinful people really are. It's not that Christians don't know this, but it can be hard to remember or to grasp when the world surrounding us constantly says that people aren't sinful. That they might need to make better choices, but how dare we actually think of people as "sinful," much less in need of a Savior. Yet this is the reality that the Bible makes clear. To take our recent elections as just one example, wherever you stood and now stand politically, the fact is that no matter who was elected in any vote, we will still have a sinful government because it is made up of sinful leaders. That isn't to say that voting doesn't matter or that we should just throw in the towel because we'll never reach perfection; instead, it should give us some perspective: even if the very best, most "Christian" people possible were put in charge of everything, there would still be terrible sin in this world, and it would come not only in spite of those great leaders, but from their very actions as well.

Therefore, when Isaiah speaks of a Messiah who is in the line of David, he doesn't simply mean a man with all of David's good qualities and none of his bad ones. No, Isaiah is speaking of how David was but a snapshot, an imperfect image of what we really need. David is given as an example not because he himself was so great, but because God's promises to him were great. Therefore, the Messiah here will be like David but also so much greater that He'll be very unlike David in some critical ways. What will that look like?

This Messiah will rule with wisdom and understanding, counsel and might. He will be both wise and righteous – not partly, not just on His good days; but everyday, in every way. Pay careful attention to why this is so – it is because at the end of **verse 2 and also verse 3**, we read that he shall have the “fear of the Lord.” In fact, he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

I've already spoken briefly on this idea of the fear of the Lord before, so I simply want to point out how this kind of fear will bring about justice and peace here. Everything that we'll read of in this chapter: the wonderful kingdom that is coming, the perfect King who will rule over it all – everything is rooted in the fear of the Lord. A thought before we move on: do you delight in fearing God? If not, what needs to change in your heart or your mind so that it would be true of you?

Note in **verse 4** how some of the most unsolvable issues of humanity will be perfectly dealt with by this Messiah: the poor shall be judged with righteousness. There will be true and genuine equity for the meek of the earth. The wicked shall actually and justly be dealt with – no escaping on a technicality here. In fact – in an image that Paul might be picking up on in the New Testament – so good will our Messiah be that righteousness is given a tangible picture in the sense of a belt that is part of the Messiah's wardrobe!

And all of this because of the fear of the Lord. How do we make progress towards embracing that ourselves? Let me give three simple – but not easy – ideas: first, it is hard to fear God if you don't know what He has said in His Word. Every one of us makes time for the things we find important – hobbies, habits. What about

reading and thinking through God's Word? There is no shortcut to simply sitting down and reading it at whatever pace you can sustain. Second: as you read, you need to have a true recognition of how forgiven you really are. Sin is more than an oopsie or an error in judgment. It is a high crime; treason and rebellion against our Creator. This is why it is presented so starkly in the Scriptures and this is why Jesus had to die to atone for it. The Heidelberg Catechism puts it this way: to live and die in the comfort of Christ, to have real joy, you must know and believe "First, how great my sins and misery are; second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery; and third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance." So it is here: you will never be truly thankful to Jesus unless you actually believe you needed – and did not deserve – His sacrifice. Then finally, you must know what the Lord requires of you: not perfection this side of heaven, but action with what He has called you to in His Word. Taken together, this is what it means to fear the Lord. It means your allegiance, your heart, your hopes and dreams.

Yet we would be giving a very incomplete – even a misleading – picture if we stopped there. This is Jesus we are talking about, after all. He does the work. He accomplishes what we need and we'll never match Him. But that is precisely the point: this Jesus calls us to follow Him and forgives us when we cry out in need.

This Jesus also brings about the peace we can never accomplish on our own...

**11:6-9** Peace on earth. First, I should point out that this is only one passage, one portrait of what peace on earth looks like. There is much more to be said from several other angles. But oh what a picture this is! Note how it breaks down: in **verses 6-7** we see things paired together that would normally be natural enemies. And as otherworldly as it seems, remember that before the Fall, there was no death in Eden. So, in one sense, the picture here is a bit of a throwback – looking to the past so that we can understand the future. Thus, the wolf shall no longer hunt the lamb, neither leopard the goat. The calf and the lion shall grow fat and old together, members of the same pen in the barnyard as it were. And a little child – defenseless, not intimidating, shall be able to lead both – having dominion over the earth just as God commanded in **Genesis 1**.

So it shall also be for the cow and the bear and the lion and the ox. This first image, then, is one of peace in every possible way. The second, in **verses 8-9** is like it...

Again, we see the young child. Notice that he is doing something that we would consider radically dangerous: playing near the cobra, even putting his hand in the hole. But in the new kingdom there is no worry – death and sin shall no longer reign. There won't be any cause for concern. And why? **Verse 9** answers: "for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

Dear friends, is this your picture of paradise? Or is it something lesser? Do you dream of mountains or white sand beaches? Of empty calendars? Then let me encourage you to dream bigger: dream of the day when Christ's kingdom is here in all its fullness. That is what you need. Even if you and I can't fully grasp what it will be like, trust that Jesus alone will fulfill our heart's deepest desires and longings. A day is coming when God's Word shall not be unknown, or ignored, or minimized. Instead, a day is coming when all that the Lord has said will be seen and lived exactly as He has commanded.

Does that mean you can't have hopes and dreams in this life? No, of course not. But it does mean that you should reserve your greatest hopes, your deepest dreams for the things that can't be bought with hard work or money, for the things that won't be accomplished by elections or advancements. Hope first and foremost, beginning to end, in the Lord! His peace is what you need. And it won't just be peace in the natural world...

**11:10-16** Peace amongst men. The peace we need will come not when everyone becomes enlightened enough to set aside their weapons and join around the campfire together. That isn't what the Bible tells us. Instead, peace will come when wickedness is truly and finally and justly and righteously dealt with. God's people will be gathered, and their enemies shall be dealt with; cut off, they will

not harass God's people any longer. It is they, finally, who will be plundered. The enemies of the Lord who will – lastingly – get exactly what their sin deserves.

Using the imagery of crossing the Red Sea, **verses 15-16** remind us of how God delivers. But lest we end less clearly than we began, let's make sure we know who our enemies are: they are not necessarily the people we disagree with in this life, nor are they necessarily our political adversaries or the nations that oppose our way of life. Instead, we are told here, our enemies must be the same as God's enemies. And He will deal with them utterly and completely.

How are we to respond to that? Two ways. First, you need to seriously and soberly ask yourself: when this day comes, will you be gathered with the Lord's people or will you be destroyed with His enemies? The answer is very simple, because it all depends upon how you respond to Jesus: if you follow Him as your Lord and King, then this day will truly bring lasting peace. But if you oppose Him, then you shall be opposed – and defeated – by the God of the Universe Himself. I urge you: this is a battle you shall not win, one that you cannot win. And you don't have to: turn to Christ, confess your sins, acknowledge Him as your Lord. Trust Him as your Savior.

For those of you here who have done precisely that, I want you to hold on to this portrait of peace: the reason we tend to shudder at such violence is because we don't truly understand that sin leads to death and we don't truly grasp how righteous God is. Yes, if this were performed by imperfect people – even the best of them – then it would still be a horrifying sight. But praise God: He knows exactly what each person deserves. He knows those who belong to Him and He knows those who oppose Him. Those who belong to Jesus will receive His mercy and grace. Those who oppose Him will not. They will get what they've worked for, what is perfectly fair: His judgment. That is a sobering picture, yes, but it is also exactly what we need: the true Messiah bringing true peace to the earth. Let's pray for exactly that – come Lord Jesus...