

The

PEACE



of

Advent

The Peace of Advent

'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.'

John 14:27

1. What does the word 'peace' convey to you?
 - Is this time of year a peaceful one for you? Why or why not?!

The Promise of Peace

Read Ezekiel 34:1-4 and v22-31.

2. Considering v1-4, what's the context of what God is saying through Ezekiel?
 - In v22-25: What does God promise to do as a solution to this?
3. In v25 God says his new covenant with his people will be one of peace. How would you define a 'covenant'?
4. The word for peace here is *shalom*. In v25-31, what images does God use to describe the extent of what it means?
 - How far from this shalom has the world fallen?
5. From what Ezekiel writes here, summarise what the true Shepherd of God's people, the prince in the line of David, will bring to God's people.
6. Look at Isaiah 9:6. Isaiah was writing several hundred years before Ezekiel. How does the promise in Isaiah of the king to be born fit with what Ezekiel writes?

The Announcement of Peace

7. Look at Luke 2:8-14. Given what we read in Ezekiel, what's the significance of the announcement of Jesus's birth being made to shepherds and not the religious leaders in Jerusalem?

- How does v11 suggest Jesus fulfils the promises of Ezekiel 34:23-24; and v14 the promise of 34:25?

The Fulfilment of Peace

8. Read John 10:10-11 and John 14:25-28.

- Who does Jesus say he is?
 - What has he come to do?
 - How will he do it?
 - And what has this got to do with Ezekiel's words in Ezek 34?
- How does Jesus bring about the new covenant of peace and give us peace?
 - What is the Spirit's role in this? (consider also Galatians 5:22-23)

9. In John 14:28 Jesus says the disciples (and we) should not let our hearts be troubled or afraid. What things tend to trouble your heart? Are there areas of your life where you don't currently enjoy peace, but wish you did?

- How is understanding who Jesus is and what he has done (and will do) for us the answer to troubled hearts?

10. Look at Colossians 3:12-15.

There is a communal aspect to the peace of God. What does this tell us about what it means to let the peace of God rule in our hearts?

- How does conflict with others rob us of peace, and how is the gospel the answer to this?

The Future of Peace

The truth is, we do not experience the fullness of God's peace - the fullest manifestation of his shalom as described in Ezekiel 34 - in this life.

11. Look at Revelation 21:1-5. How does this describe the ultimate fulfilment of God's promise of peace?

- How can we be people of peace now (and in this Christmas season) as we wait for this future peace?

The hope



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The book of Lamentations was written in the devastating aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The first chapters lament the sin and necessary punishment of God's people. And into that picture of darkness and destruction suddenly shines a ray of light.

1. Read Lamentations 3:21-24

- Why is hope necessary for human flourishing?
- What is the basis of the author's hope?
 - Does this consciously form the basis of your hope for your future? If yes, in what ways?

The promises within the Old Testament that a Messiah would come gave hope to the people of Israel. And it is the fact that he has come, and will come again, that can give us hope.

2. Read Isaiah 9:1-2.

- Why do you think the Old and New Testaments use darkness as a picture of life lived apart from God and without the knowledge of God (Eph 5:8; 1 Peter 2:9)?
 - Why might darkness also be a good description for times of difficulty we might go through? (For example, Ps 23:4; Ps 88:6, 18).
- What hope does Isaiah hold out for the people he's talking about?
 - He talks about this future hope for change in the past tense. Why?

Ultimately, this promise is fulfilled in the coming of Christ. In what sense is he Light in the darkness - whether of separation from/ignorance of God or personal trials and difficulties?

3. Read Isaiah 9:6-7. What does each of the titles in v6 mean or convey?

This is who Jesus is. As you consider the various situations you face at the moment, which of these truths about Jesus can give you hope and why?

4. Read Luke 1:5-7. Why might Zechariah and Elizabeth have struggled to keep hope alive?

- What might cause us, or someone we know, to struggle to keep hope alive?

5. Read Luke 1:8-25. What do we learn of Zechariah and Elizabeth? In particular, why might Zechariah have responded the way he did?
 - What hope does the angel hold out for them, and for their son?
 - Zechariah is told to call his son John. John means, 'YHWH is gracious'. Why is this an appropriate name for him?
 - What are some of the negative consequences in our lives when we lose sight of the truth that God is gracious? What are the positive consequences when we understand that God is gracious more deeply?
6. Read Luke 1:57-80. Considering v68-79, how does Zechariah interpret the coming of Christ, whom his son will go before? What is Christ's coming for?
 - How would you summarise why Christ came? How does that compare to what Zechariah says?

As Christians, our hope for the future is tied up with the second coming - the second advent - of Christ.

7. Read 1 Thess 4:13-18. What contrast does Paul draw between Christians and others in v13?
 - Considering v17-18 why is the second coming of Christ a reason for hope in grief and encouragement for the present? (See also 1 Peter 1:13).

| The Hope of Advent for you this season |

- What part of the verses you read and studied today bring you hope and joy for this week and the run up to Christmas?
- What practical steps can you take to actively dwell on these truths and let them shape your Advent season?

The *joy*



of

Advent

The joy of Advent

"The joy of the Lord is your strength."
Nehemiah 8:10

Joy

1. We will discuss the particular joy of Advent later, for now, how would you define Christian joy? How does this differ from other forms of joy?
 - Why does it matter that joy is a fruit of the Spirit? (Gal 5:22)
 - Why is 'the joy of the Lord our strength'? (Consider the wider context: Neh 8:9-12)
 - What things tend to limit your joy?
 - Are there things we can do to cultivate joy in our lives? Do you consciously practice these?
 - In particular consider John 15:9-11. What role does obedience play in the level of our joy, or lack of it?
2. Read Jeremiah 31:10-15. Jeremiah addresses this to Israel in captivity/exile. Considering v10-11, what is the promise?
 - Look at v12: what will be the outcome of this redemption?
 - Look at v13: what transformation does God say he's going to bring about and what picture is used for this?
 - How does this compare to a legalistic view of religion?
 - Look at v14: What will be at the root of their joy?
3. Look at Jeremiah 31:15. This describes the anguish that will come with the destruction of invasion and exile and seems discordant to the theme of joy that has preceded it. How is this picked up in the account of Christ's birth? (See Matt 2:16-18)
 - What does this link back to Israel's experience tell us about the coming of Christ into our world?

Joy at the First Advent

4. Consider the following individuals involved in the birth of Christ. Why are they experiencing (or proclaiming) joy?
 - Mary: Luke 1:46-50
 - The angel: Luke 2:9-12
 - The shepherds: Luke 2:20 (while this does not mention joy, it's fair to surmise it was present!)
 - The magi: Matthew 2:10-11
5. How might Advent be a source of joy for us?
 - What do we need to do in this season to experience this joy?
6. Now compare the above responses with that of Herod: Matthew 2:1-4
 - Why is Herod not experiencing joy? What's troubling him?
 - How does Herod's response foreshadow our expressive individualist age?
 - How might this explain (in part) why our current culture does not take joy in the birth of Christ but rather looks to other things in the 'holiday season' to give happiness?

Joy at the Second Advent

7. Read Revelation 19:6-9. This describes the joy of believers at Christ's second coming - his second advent. What is the source of that joy?
 - Revelation is written to help believers endure suffering now. How might the prospect of future eternal joy help us persevere and stay faithful to Jesus when life is hard, or when others find no joy in him?

The

love



of

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The Love of Advent

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

John 15:12-13

1. What makes you feel most loved?
2. Look at 1 John 4:8-9. How do Advent and Christmas reveal the character of God?
 - When you consider God's character, what is most prominent? (For example, his justice? Anger? Mercy? Patience? Love?)
 - What does it mean for you that love is central to who God is?
3. Read Psalm 118:1-9.
 - What does it mean that God's love is steadfast?
 - What does it mean that it endures forever?
 - Considering these verses, what responses can flow out of knowing God's love is steadfast?
 - When you experience feelings of self-pity, anxiety, fear, or rejection, what do you do with those feelings? How do you get out of them, and does knowing God's love play a part in that? Could it/should it?
4. Read Psalm 118:21-24. Who or what is the stone rejected by the builders that has become the cornerstone?
 - How is this the ultimate fulfillment of God's steadfast love for his people, Israel?
5. Read John 1:1-5
 - What do these verses tell us about Jesus?
 - How do these verses compare to Genesis 1:1-3? What does this tell us about Jesus, and his purpose for coming into the world?
6. Read John 1:6-13. What do these verses tell us about who John the Baptist was... and wasn't?

- Why is it both humbling and encouraging to know we also are not the Light but are to be witnesses to the Light?
 - Considering v11: Why did the people of Jesus' day not 'receive' him? Why do people today still refuse to do so?
 - Considering v12-13: Why did Christ come?
 - How does being a child of God feature in how you think of yourself? Is this what your identity is grounded on, or is it something else?
7. Read John 1:14-17.
- Why is the Word becoming flesh a stunning event?
 - Jesus was, and is, full of grace and truth. How do these contrast with the law (v17)?
 - Why do you personally need both grace and truth?
8. Read John 15:12-13. How can we love others as Jesus has loved us?
- In particular, how can we bring them the grace and truth of Christ, or lay down our lives for them?
9. Read Revelation 22:1-5. How will Jesus' second advent, and the new heavens and the new earth be a total fulfilment of his first?
- How will the new creation be a full expression of God's love for his people in Christ?

I The Love of Advent for you this season I

- How can you remind yourself during this season of the love of God put on display in the Christmas story?
- What could you do this season to share that love with those around you?