

December 10, 2017
PEACE: Why we love kids!
Isaiah 9:1-7

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Where’s the hope? What’s the future? Who do we turn to? We need grown ups.

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In the 1st Century, two children figure prominently. One is John the Baptist. His father, Zechariah prophesies, *"You, my **child**, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace"* (Luke 1:67-79).

The other is Jesus. When the angel appeared to Mary, he said, *"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a **son**, and you are to call him Jesus (which means rescuer or deliverer). He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end"* (Luke 1:30-33).

Great Expectations

In Isaiah’s day, people were full of expectation. Israel believed their God was the one and only God, He had made this whole world, and He had established a solemn covenant to save them. So, if they were going into exile, God would deliver them. The exile did end, but they still were not free (they were occupied by empire after empire). In 167 BC a small group of guerrillas under Judas Maccabaeus did successfully rebel against their

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- When Jesus is born, the angels praise God, saying, *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth **peace** to those on whom his favour rests"* (Luke 2:14).

It's not about war. It's about peace. Throughout the Bible, God's purpose for His creation, the goal of His creation, the perfection of His creation is **peace**. Way back in Eden, everyone and everything coexisted in peace with one another and with God. The image of God's resurrected and renewed creation in Revelation is peace with God, and peace between people, nations, and everything else in creation.

The biblical word for peace is *"shalom,"* a Hebrew word meaning peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, fulfilment, welfare, and tranquillity. Shalom only comes when God's creation is in right relationship with Him and with one another.

The full realization of this is something that comes after Jesus returns and all of creation is renewed. The Bible uses some interesting metaphors to describe this future triumph of shalom. In another Isaiah-looking-forward-to-Jesus passage, Isaiah describes how Jesus will come with wisdom and of understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. He will judge the needy with righteousness, He will give decisions for the poor with justice. Righteousness and faithfulness will be His belt and sash. In this time of *shalom*: the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them (Isaiah 11:1-8).

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Jesus can bring this kind of peace between people. *"Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace"*(Colossians 3:11-15).

God wins the decisive battle over evil not with swords, spears and bloodshed. He wins His victory by love, revealed to us on the cross. In what we consider weakness, He shows us strength. In what we consider complete disaster, He shows us total victory. We don't need more war. More walls. More divisions. More hatred. More racism. More prejudice. More guns. More prisons. We need peace. And, those of us who know Jesus know, the only way to true peace – with God, within ourselves, and with others – is through Jesus.

What is it about kids?

All this leads to an interesting observation: the HOPE in these passages and the PEACE in these passages come through ***kids***. In a world where the important ones were adult men, hope and peace should come through powerful men – men like King David, King Tiglath-pileser, or Caesar Augustus. But in Isaiah, a ***child*** is born into a world at war. In a time of upheaval and revolution, Zechariah talks about his ***child***, John, leading us on the path of peace. The Bible makes a big deal of Jesus coming as a ***child*** – a vulnerable, dependent, speechless child – in a time when kings of violence and genocide.

It all seems wrong. Israel needed a warrior like David or Judas Maccabaeus. The world did not need another bawling, helpless baby.

God gives us a baby. God comes as a baby. It's ridiculous. It's ludicrous. It's foolish.

What is it about a child? Once, Jesus' disciples asked, *"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"*(Matthew 18:1-5). What did they expect? Full of hope for another David or Judas Maccabaeus, they anticipated Jesus would talk about kings and conquerors. Jesus called a little child over, and placed the child among them. *"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

What is it about children? Children understand ***shalom***. They don't see ethnicity, ability, or status. They accept everyone. They are also quite happily dependent on their parents. They know they cannot make it on their own. And, although they kick back against their parents now and then, they learn from and follow the example of their parents, too.

"Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." **Shalom** happens when we humble ourselves, accept everyone else, and are quite happily dependent on our Father. Although we may kick back against our Father, we ultimately choose to learn from our Father and follow His example, too.

We think the world is saved by power, wealth, influence, and strength. The shocking paradox of God's salvation story is that He doesn't come in power, strength, and glory. He doesn't come blasting His enemies to smithereens. He comes in humility, vulnerability and love. God conquers the powers of evil by humility, vulnerability and love. "*This foolish plan of God*," Paul says, "*is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength*" (1 Corinthians 1:20-25).

We come to God and get to know His peace by coming in humility, vulnerability and love. As adults, taught to be strong, self-assured, and ruggedly independent, that's incredibly hard to do. It turns counter to our human nature. It grinds against our souls like nails on a chalkboard. But only when we are humble can God conquer the demons in our lives.

God changed the world – and we change the world – by living in in humility, vulnerability and love as well, too. Something about the image of Chuck Norris wiping out his enemies with AK-47s appeals to us. Surely Jesus wants us to annihilate those who are not like us, too, right? Surely we build the Kingdom of God with bazookas, bricks, and mortars, right?

Jesus paused as He approached Jerusalem. The city was seething with people who longed to see God come in power, churning with people wanting to make Israel great again by violent revolution. This is what He said: "*If you only knew this day what would bring you peace*" (Luke 19:41).

What would bring them peace? Only God. Not a bloodthirsty tribal God, but a loving, serving, sacrificing God. Only God on a cross.

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In Isaiah's vision of *shalom*, God says, "*and a little child shall lead them.*" Little children get it. Maybe we need to spend more time hanging out with children. We need to learn from kids. Rather than just teaching them to "grow up," we can let them teach us to "grow down": learn to learn as they learn, and to love as they love. Kids are not just the church of tomorrow, they can teach us today. Learn from a kid today. Be a kid today.

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