

Incarnation – Prince of Peace & Children of Grace

Isa. 9:6 & Gal. 4:4-7

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Decisions... we all make them.

And each decision has differing levels of consequences, both good and bad, negative and positive. In fact, much of parenting is the process of helping your children understand that decisions have consequences, see those consequences, and then make a healthy decision. Humanity has been making decisions for as long as we have had history. At the same time, we can feel very far removed from those in antiquity or ancient history. And, when we read their stories and see the consequences of their decisions, we can often feel that we wouldn't have made the same mistakes or decisions. Yet, our stories and natures are far more intertwined. If we are willing to step into their stories, we will begin to see ourselves in them more and more.

The ancient people of Israel faced significant problems and decisions. And, like us, they allowed their hearts and not the truth of God to guide them. This led to disastrous consequences for generations. And as the story unfolds, we will get the impression that God and his love felt very distant to them as those painful consequences unfolded. But let's be honest: God and his love often feel very distant and far off to us today. Yet, just as the ancient people of Israel were making decisions, so was God. His decisions, however, were ultimately for man's flourishing. And, while it would take generations, he was preparing the world for the arrival of his Son, the long-promised Messiah. Out of his extravagant love, God will send the Light of the world into the world. And, if we are willing to enter this story, we will see that God's love is not distant, even when it might feel that way. Because God's love is not distant, we are not without hope for a life of peace. In fact, through the incarnation, we are clearly reminded that **Jesus offers a peace that makes us whole.**

1. God is a righteous and sovereign judge. (Isa. 9:7&8)

- a. **How to read the Prophets** - There are some tough passages in the Prophets. Passages that make us do a double-take with God. And make us squint at ourselves in the mirror.
 - i. **The prophets (prophetic literature) shine a light on our nature and God's nature.**
 - ii. When we read the prophets, we need to routinely ask two questions:
 - 1. What is true about man?
 - 2. What is true about God?

- iii. Remember, we've said it this way before: God's Word operates as a lens and a mirror.
 - 1. A lens for us to see God clearly.
 - 2. A mirror for us to see ourselves correctly.
 - b. **God's nature: They reacquaint us with who God truly is.**
 - i. **Isa. 9:7 - Righteousness and Justice** - God is not one or the other; he is both.
 - 1. In the OT, both of these things were legal designations.
 - 2. You could only be found to be righteous by the evidence of your right-doing (justice).
 - 3. In the prophets, we see God's righteousness and justice.
 - ii. **Grace:** The very reality of God's authority and justice that is handed out in small doses should prompt us to proclaim praise for grace!
 - 1. God is slow to anger and rich in mercy, and we see that time and time again in the prophets.
 - iii. **Loyalty:** God is patiently working on behalf of humanity at large and his people specifically.
 - 1. vv. 1-7 are a promise not just to Israel but as we see now through the lens of Jesus, for all people.
 - 2. These promises are fulfilled in part through the incarnation (Jesus' earthly life & ministry).
 - 3. They will be fulfilled completely in the second coming of Jesus.
 - a. Remember, in Advent, we look back to remember Jesus' first coming and look forward to his second coming.
 - c. **The words of Isaiah draw out in us a discomfort with the justice of God.**
 - i. We like when his justice works on our behalf.
 - ii. We don't like it when his justice seems unfair, lopsided, or doesn't fit within our preview.
 - d. **Either God is God, or He isn't. → These are the only two options.**
 - i. **This is about whether God is God or He isn't.**
 - ii. There is an uncomfortable reality in this passage; if God is majestic enough to save us, he is sovereign to judge us.
 - 1. We like it when God does generous and merciful God things.
 - 2. We like it when God's ability to bring justice occurs in our favor.
 - 3. We like it when God's patience is so great it seems to border on the absurd.
 - a. If we like these things, we must confess and give praise that God is absolutely sovereign over all things and in all ways, even when they make us uncomfortable.
 - e. **God's sovereignty is a truth for every area of our lives.**
 - i. Fear: What is the role of fear in our relationship with God?
 - 1. Fear = Reverence / Fear ≠ Cowering or Hiding
 - a. We are to have
 - ¹⁰ **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.**
 - ¹¹ **For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life.**
 - ¹² **If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; if you scoff, you alone will bear it. (Prov. 9:10-12)**

2. Jesus – The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6)

- a. Webster's Dictionary - A freedom from disturbance or an absence of conflict.
 - i. While this is true, the Bible offers us a deeper look at the idea of peace.
- b. **Shalom - The OT Hebrew word - שלום**
 - i. **To be brought into a state of completeness or wholeness.**
 - ii. This can be used as a verb, i.e., to bring Shalom (wholeness).
 - 1. **²³ If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.**" (Ex. 18:23)
 - a. Moses' father-in-law to him – If Moses would let able men help him in hearing the people's cases, Moses will be able to endure as a leader and the people with experience **shalom**.
 - 2. **²⁴ Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.** (Ju. 6:24)
 - a. Gideon declares the Lord is shalom when he receives his call to Judge Israel's enemies.
 - b. Here the Lord is the one who will rescue his people through Gideon and bring them back into wholeness.
 - 3. **³³ So shall their blood come back on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendants forever. But for David and for his descendants and for his house and for his throne there shall be peace from the LORD forevermore.**" (1 kings 2:33)
 - a. In the moment of a transfer of power, Joab has ulterior motives and never intended to keep his promise of peace with Solomon.
 - b. **We know that wholeness (shalom) will not always mark the house of David (consider Ahaz), but the "Prince of Peace" will come from David's line and rule forever on David's throne. (Isa. 9)**
 - c. **Jesus is the only one who brings us into an unending and increasing state of wholeness (peace / shalom).**
- c. **The beauty of Advent: We do not have to remain in a state of brokenness.**
 - i. Advent continues to call us back to the gracious reality that God loved us so much that he sent his only Son so that we could be brought back into shalom with him.
 - 1. **Important:** When we talk about this, it doesn't mean that we are all of a sudden transported out of this life or away from the pain of sin. It means that we begin to experience the peace that comes from transformation into the image of Jesus and that one day (in the age to come), we will experience it completely with Christ.
 - 2. **This is why Paul writes, ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.** (Rom. 8:18)
 - ii. **Jesus is the only one who can bring us back into wholeness.**
 - 1. This has been the story all along: The major theme of Nahum's prophetic message is that God is faithful to his people even in their suffering. This faithfulness will culminate in the birth of the Messiah, Jesus.
- d. **The peace that lasts only comes from the one who overcomes.**
 - i. If we are not born of flesh and blood... Flesh and blood cannot take away our peace. (Jn. 1:12-13)

- ii. Turning his attention from those who did not receive the Word to those who did, the evangelist says, *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*
 - 1. To 'receive' him means, as this verse indicates, to believe in his name.
 - 2. To believe in a person's name is to believe in the person, because the name stands for the person.
- iii. Receiving him involves accepting the teaching and revelation of God he brought. Repeatedly this Gospel speaks about those who receive or do not receive Jesus' testimony (3:11, 32–33; 5:34; 12:48; 17:8). To those who received him he gave the 'right to become children of God'.¹

3. Children of Grace (Gal. 4:4-7)

- a. Again, the beauty of Advent → We declare God's great love for humanity.
 - i. Rebecca McLaughlin writes, **"Professor Jonathan Feng knows more about astronomy than I ever will, and he points us to the wonder of Christmas like this: 'What's truly amazing about the Christian faith is the idea that the God who made the universe from quarks to galaxies also cares enough about us to be born as a human and to suffer and die to bring forgiveness and new life to broken people.'"**²
- b. This is a beautiful passage on the implication of the incarnation.
 - i. The larger passage plays on the normal and understood household roles to show the power and extravagance of God's grace applied to you and me through Christ.
 - ii. There are certain pictures which captured Paul's imagination and which he therefore tended to use again and again: human birth and growth was one of them.³
 - iii. We must recognize that as a modern audience, we recoil at the imagery Paul uses here.
 - 1. Slave = Servant → No matter how we unpack these words, they still hit us awkwardly because much of our modern perspective is a rejection of perceived negative hierarchy.
 - 2. Son = A natural-born child into the family. → For us today all children are seen as worthy of an inheritance (heirs). In the first century and through antiquity before, only the oldest son would have received the inheritance. Then, he would have had the moral obligation to care for and provide for the rest of the family.
 - 3. **Paul isn't justifying these social structures, he is using them to paint a picture of God's lavish love and grace.**
 - a. **We shouldn't dismiss them thinking we have it all ordered properly, instead we should ask the question of lowliness: How am I in need of God's grace?**
- c. **v.4 – Paul reminds us of both God's sovereignty, justice, love, and grace.**
 - i. This fits what we have heard in Isaiah 7:14 & 9:1ff → God long promised that he would send one through a miraculous birth to be the rescue for humanity.
 - ii. **Paul affirms all of that here in regards to Jesus.**

¹ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 68.

² McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Is Christmas Unbelievable?: Four Questions Everyone Should Ask About the World's Most Famous Story*. The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

³ R. Alan Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 157.

1. “When the fullness of time had come...” – God’s sovereign action and will is being carried out. I.e., Redemptive history cannot be stopped.
2. “Born of a woman... under the law...” – That is God was doing a new creation work, establishing a second Adam to make a covenant with.
 - a. See Incarnation #3 – The Virgin Birth for more notes on this.
 - b. The point here is that God is doing what he long promised in Gen. 3:15, to send the one who would crush the head of the deceiver who brought death through Adam. (cf. Rom. 5:12-20) → **Paul is explaining the deep love and grace of God that is expressed through the incarnation.**
 - c. For any Jew, whether it be Paul or a Judaizer, the chief relevance of such a phrase would be its correspondence with Genesis 3:15. Here at last is the promised ‘seed’ of the woman who will crush the serpent’s head. Paul was no doubt also thinking of the promise of Isaiah 7:14 concerning the bearing of Immanuel by the ‘young woman’ mentioned there.⁴

d. adoption as sons.

- i. This phrase renders the word *huiothesia*, a term consistently used in Paul’s time to refer to the event of adoption as a son (not the abstraction “sonship”). We have noted that adoption is a motif foreign to the picture of vv 1–2. But that only shows that Paul uses that picture for what it is worth, a portrait of liberation from slavery. There is more. **We are not liberated to live on our own, that being in fact an impossibility. We are taken by God into his own family. Thus, the cosmic change enacted by God in his sovereign act of timely redemption involves also the sovereign act of adoption by which he creates the new family of his church (1:13; 5:10).** “The adoptee is taken out of his previous state and is placed in a new relationship with his new *pater familias* ... In effect, he starts a new life.”⁵
 1. **Obedience is God’s love language...** God has freed the will to be obedient to himself.⁶
 2. **The Spirit both reminds and prompts us towards obedience** - For it is by the presence of the Spirit in our hearts that we are assured of our sonship of God (cf. Rom. 8:16) and so are enabled to pray with confidence.⁷
 3. **“Abba, Father...”** – This is an intimate title that would be used by a small child for their faith. Paul is teaching of the intimacy and abiding union we have with Christ. → **Caution:** While it was the usual intimate name used by a child to its father within the home, it is certainly over-sentimentalizing, if not trivializing, to translate it as ‘Daddy’.⁸

⁴ R. Alan Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 161.

⁵ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 33A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 390–391.

⁶ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 33A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 392.

⁷ R. Alan Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 162.

⁸ R. Alan Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 163.

- a. **Yet the use of this intimate word is, to Paul, the proof that we have the ‘inner witness’ of the Spirit within our hearts; that in itself convinces us that we are children, not slaves.⁹**
- e. ***an heir by God’s act of adoption.***
 - i. In the Note on 3:18 we have seen good reason to think that the Galatians were introduced to the motif of inheritance by the Teachers, who spoke of it as a highly desirable thing the Galatians could acquire—along with the blessing of Abraham—by following the patriarch in observance of the Law. One suspects that inheritance is not a figure Paul would have developed with great enthusiasm on his own, but given the valence it now has in the minds of the Galatians, he does not ignore it. In 3:18 and 3:29, then, and **especially in 4:1–7 Paul makes his own use of the motif, finally insisting that, having inherited the church-creating Spirit of Christ, the Galatians have become heirs not through Abraham, but through God himself (cf. 4:30; 5:21).¹⁰**
 - 1. They had it upside down and so do we. → They thought they were heirs because of birth and of action (circumcision). We tend to think we are heirs by our works, moral actions (conservative and progressive), and financial well-being.
 - 2. We are heirs because of grace, and we have inherited grace.

4. Seasons are just that, seasons.

- a. If we are heirs, then there is something fundamentally true and different about us. What is different? We have received an inheritance of grace and peace. That inheritance is to flow out of us and into our everyday lives. One theologian puts it this way, “We know we’ve been adopted into God’s family when we respond to the circumstances in our lives with the cries of intimacy and dependence. **We know we are sons or daughters of God when we look to our heavenly Father in time of need with confidence and trust.** We know we’re his children when we find ourselves crying out, “Abba! Father!”¹¹
 - i. **When the love and hope of God are the rudder of our lives, we are positioned to see seasons for what they are... seasons.**
 - ii. **This helps us to endure faithfully in hard seasons.**
 - iii. **This helps us to remain humble in abundant seasons.**
 - 1. Paul said, “**12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**” (Phil. 4:12-13)
 - iv. **iii. Phil. 4:7-9 → God’s peace guards our hearts.**
7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

⁹ R. Alan Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 163.

¹⁰ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 33A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 392.

¹¹ Todd Wilson, *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 139.

- b. This helps our eyes to be postured to see the love of God even in the hardest of seasons.
 - i. This postures our hearts to love others because we have first experienced the extravagant and gap-closing love of our Father in heaven.