

King of Peace

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, I'd like to go back to that passage this morning for our sermon. And we're going to start today, well really, Alistair started it for us last week, last Sunday evening, when his theme was the Advents of the King.

So our theme is really an advent theme over the next few Sunday mornings, and also our Carol service, which is next Sunday evening. And in many ways, well, the title of the series, which is very short, is Forgotten King, question mark.

And today we're looking at King of Peace, so Jesus as a King of Peace. And I hope that that will tie in well with the baptism also later on in the service.

So the Bible is all about big stories, really. It's huge stories that we have in the Bible.

But sometimes people call today the meta-narrative of life, that there is something beyond just our own living and our own particular individual lives.

[1 : 0 6] So there is a big story, and the Bible is really good and is really significant in the thread of one big story that it has.

I think that's interesting for us because the society in which we live in today, which is pretty much secularist in its thinking and its philosophy, it struggles with that.

It struggles with the idea of a big picture, of a big story, of something significant that oversees all of life, because ultimately there's nothing out there in a secularist's viewpoint of the world.

We are isolated ultimately in an impersonal universe, so that the challenge moves from this big story and this greater reason for living to your individual story, and your individual story being the only one that really matters.

That's the only one that has significance. I'm going to say a little bit more about that tonight, in a sense. But the whole concept therefore of community and of society is, in many ways, a best pragmatic.

[2 : 2 1] It is what we can use and what we can adopt in order to help me as an individual to make my survival better.

But even then, I think there can be a struggle to ascribe ultimate meaning both to community and to society and to the individual story of our lives.

It's living simply for the sake of living, and that is often our conclusion. And for many, that has become, particularly those who think deeply about these matters, a council of despair, as Western society and culture chooses to reject, really for the first time in history, any concept of a big picture, any overriding purpose or meaning, or even a higher power or God, or however you would understand that, then things have changed radically.

And there is a fear among many that we will descend into a pre-modern survival of the fittest, that that is all that's left for us.

There's no big picture, there's no absolute truth, there's no ultimate reality, there's no one outside ourselves to bring light, to bring wisdom or to bring hope, no real answer to our longing for purpose and meaning, no meta-narrative, no big picture, which makes for a council of despair, if we follow it through to its logical conclusion.

[4 : 0 0] Isaiah in the Old Testament was a prophet, and Isaiah was a prophet who was writing into not the same kind of despair or the same kind of darkness, because there was this overriding belief in a God, whether it was a God who was for you or against you, but he was writing in a period of despair and darkness, and in chapter A of Isaiah, there's a whole lot of reference to the darkness of the people to whom he was writing, the despair and the destruction that they were facing.

He was a prophet of his own people, God's people in the Old Testament, the people, the Jewish people who were chosen by God, but who had rebelled and turned against God and rejected him and who worshiped idols of the countries around them.

And because of that, they came under God's judgment, and he is bringing this message in a period of real darkness and despair, not only a message that explains what's happening to them, but also to give them a great sense of hope, that the oppressing, conquering nations around them aren't the final word.

It's not really the end of the story, but there is hope for them. There is a remnant, if they will come back to the Lord, there is great hope and a great future for them, a message of repentance and hope.

And he speaks in the passage that Mary read, he speaks of, for the people who are walking in darkness have seen a great light, and those who dwell in the land of deep darkness on them a light has shone.

[5 : 3 6] And he speaks about this important peace and this important light that he will reveal to them and it will be the means of their rescue. And ultimately, it's the core of the big message of the meta-narrative of Scripture.

Right through the Old Testament, hundreds of years before Jesus, we have God revealing the fact that He will send, He will give, He will gift a Savior to the world, and that is the message of the advent, the message that we speak about, the coming of Jesus Christ into the world which we remember at this time of year.

And as they return to God, they would recognize that what they've experienced is to point them to this bigger story, to this powerful meta-narrative, this big picture of the Bible.

This one central message for the Jewish people, for the Gentile people of which we're a part, those are not Jews, for ancient people, for pre-modern people, for post-modern people, for all humanity, there is this message of the coming Savior then who, as we know, has come in the person of Jesus Christ.

So clearly Isaiah has given this message hundreds of years before it happened of the Messiah of Jesus, one that is often read at this time of year and referred to as this great prediction and prophecy of Jesus Christ for verse 6, to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be in his shoulders, his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end.

[7 : 3 4] And that speaking into the coming of Jesus Christ, unto us a child is born, the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, the birth of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this prophecy, is the light that shines in the gloom and the darkness of the spiritually lost and broken world into which Isaiah wrote and into which we are all living also.

And it's there for a time of great celebration, you know when a child is born? Great celebration. It's a great time of joy, a new life in the world, amazing life, amazing uniqueness that each of you when you were born, amazing uniqueness, amazing character, nobody else like you, fruit of your parents, this great celebration and we celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ.

In our worship today, in our lives as believers, the story of grace which we're going to shortly hear when she's going to be baptized and testifies to the joy of coming to know Jesus, this Jesus Christ transforming her own life, but this Creator, Savior and Lord and who gives our lives as we worship on the Lord's days, we worship on the first day of the eight, this realignment, this rebirth and discovery of the real purpose of our lives.

Unto us a child is born. So we take great comfort this morning when we look at a passage that was written, 700 or so years before Jesus, that Jesus was always part of God's plan.

He was always part of the plan. The Messiah, the Savior was always the redeemer of fallen humanity, rescuing people from death and separation from God as a result of a rejection of Him.

[9 : 26] And sin in a broader context as it does here in this very particular context for the people of God in the Old Testament, sin for us, it leaves us in darkness, maybe not immediately, but there is a gloom, there's a darkness that comes over us when we have turned our back on the living God who created us and who loved it.

A kind of gloom, a mistrust, a selfishness, a confusion about whose rights prevail in the life and the clamour about how we are going to give ourselves meaning and purpose and how we will find salvation in life itself.

How is it that we find a meaning and a direction and a purpose in life? Is it through our personal identity and our choice? Is it through political activism, environmentalism, lifestyle change, the chaos of a million voices in our lives?

When we see the hints of beauty and creativity and love, we are aching for something that it points to, something of which they're only an echo, something beyond ourselves, and we find that and we see it and we know it and we experience it, and we are renewed when we come to Jesus Christ because we find, it's like we click together.

We realise for whom we've been born and who made us and who loves us and who redeems us. Jesus Christ was always part of the plan and God has always been the answer.

[11 : 04] God's always the answer to us as we've found out in our own lives as He deals and as He reveals Himself in community here through the Word and the giving of His Son.

For unto us a child is born, to us a Son is given. God gives His Son. King Jesus needed to be born.

See a little bit more about who He is, but the eternal God, the Son of God needed to be born as a human being. He needed to come into our life, into our existence, into our chaos.

The child who needed to become a man like no other because He is God the Son. This Christ was born into this world.

The answer to our need for belonging, for love, for purpose was never going to be in self-help. It was never going to be in just working things out, doing our best.

[12 : 05] And separation from life and love and God has always been beyond our capability to put right. But Christianity stands absolutely alone in not demanding that we seek to reach up to God somehow by our own efforts, by our own trial and error.

But rather that God reaches down into our experience and into our need to rescue us. He speaks in verse 4 about a yoke of His burning and the staff is showed as the rod of the oppressor.

You have broken it as in the day of Midian. These are Old Testament references to the way God had miraculously saved his own people at different times, from Egypt, from the rod of oppression and from slavery, where they were miraculously redeemed not by their own strength but by His.

And in the days of Midian which speaks about Gideon, and the way Gideon miraculously was used not in his own might and in his own strength but in the strength of God to see redemption and freedom and hope.

And these Old Testament pictures are there to again point us to the miraculous redemption that God's own Son alone can give. Our hope is in God's gift of Jesus Christ, the authority of God is on His shoulders.

[13 : 27] And He's described here with very well known, I think for many of us anyway, different names. Wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Names are great, you know. Maybe today they're not so important for us, maybe we just name people because we like the name, but names were always really important in the ancient Near East and in many cultures still today, names are really important.

My name, obviously, speaks a lot about the kind of guy that I am because your name does. Sometimes you kind of just fit into the role of your name. So my name is really the people's ruler.

That's what it means. So, you know, I can see myself fitting into that particular designation of my name. There is actually a variant of that name that some people say, let's say I'm the hangman.

So you take it with you know, Derek, you know the Derek D-E-R-I-C-K, the cranes, that's where that comes from, the crane, high up hangman, Derek.

[14 : 35] So I'm either a hangman or I'm the people's ruler. Take your pick, punk, whatever it is. Okay, so we have these different names, but in the Bible names were hugely significant and spoke into the character of the person being named.

And so here we have Jesus Christ, the gift of God, the child that is born, a son is given, wonderful counselor he's spoken of. You know, someone, the counselor, someone absolutely worth listening to.

You know, someone who, when you know someone when they speak, there's a weightiness about what they say and you like listening to them.

That's the kind of picture of this wonderful counselor. Christ in John, the beginning of John's gospel is called the word, Jesus called the word and the beginning was the word because he is this communication from God.

Not just what he says, but just in his character, in his being. He is the supernatural wisdom of God and he's like a mirror that speaks into our own soul and reflects often who we are and what we are.

[15 : 46] He brings divine words of comfort and challenge, love expressed and explained. We find in him this wonderful counsel that is the key to understanding who we are in our own being and in our brokenness, often in our search for belonging and purpose and wholeness.

Jesus Christ is the counselor who cascades his truth in his word to us and reveals the hope that he gives us through his person, his work, his accomplished death on the cross and his resurrection to the right hand of God.

So you've got this picture of the Christ who's worth listening to, wonderful counselor, but also the one who is mighty God.

Wonderful counselor, mighty God. It's a tremendous juxtaposition we're given here, a paradox that you have. This amazing 700 year BCE prophecy of Jesus that a child, I mean it was unbelievable, a child would come, a child who is mighty God.

It's inconceivable that this would be the case. This is the great monotheistic nation of the world, the world, the only peoples that believed in a monotheistic God, a God who was just on his own, there wasn't a multiplicity of gods.

[17 : 14] And yet they're saying this child who is born will be mighty God. And we know, don't we, the newborn children are the most vulnerable and it's the most needy expression in many ways of humanity, most vulnerable and needy.

And yet he is referred to here also as mighty God. So when we come to the nativity story, we don't just go, ah, isn't that sweet? Isn't he beautiful?

This Christ of nativity is paradoxically and mind-blowingly in an unparalleled way also the God of the creation, the God of the universe.

This is mighty God. Jesus was always God's plan, that God the Son, in all the mystery of God, the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, three persons, one God as it's revealed throughout the New Testament is the God who is the Savior.

This was His plan. Jesus is no bit player. He's no psychopath that comes in and makes these unique claims of who He is. He is the God who comes, God in the flesh.

[18 : 21] Jesus is what God looks like as a human being, as it were, in a way that we can grasp. Who of us can grasp that God is Spirit and what God as a person but Spirit would be like God, even the Father.

But we can begin to grasp what God looks like in the person of Jesus Christ. He comes to reveal Himself but also to represent us, to be one of us in order to face the guilt and the separation that is our dessert.

So the challenge for us and the reality for us is that if God isn't on the cross, then we are truly deluded.

We are truly to be pitied more than all people. If it is not God the Son on the cross, it is a worthless reality. It is daydreaming, it is make-believe.

Mighty God is this wonderful counselor who is given to us, born to die, to rise again as God in our place. That's the Bible's big picture.

[19 : 34] We can take it from Genesis chapter 1 right through. That is the Bible's meta-narrative. It is that Jesus Christ was always God's rescue plan for us.

That alone can explain why I am here. That alone explains why I am here. It's the only reason that I'm preaching here. Believe me, I'd rather be at the back in some ways from a human point of view.

But this is a great message and a great truth. It's the only way, it's the only explanation why grace is choosing today to be come in front of everyone and be baptized in a most un-twenty-first century act of obedience and belonging to Jesus Christ and His salvation.

Mighty God who has changed our hearts from the inside out. That is why we come and worship. That's why we prioritize that in our lives. There was a guy here a few weeks ago, a German philosopher, a tourist who was an atheist but who really knew the Bible well.

I know the first thing that was really interesting to him and confusing and paradoxical for him as he came in at 10 past five or something in the evening.

[20 : 52] Why there was young women at the front practicing singing? Why weren't they out clubbing? Why weren't they out enjoying themselves? What an earthly doing on a Sunday night in church and why were all these people coming in to worship God?

He couldn't understand that because it seemed ridiculous for him and it seems ridiculous for many people, isn't it? But it's because we've come to know this child, this wonderful counselor who's mighty God who's changed our hearts from the inside out and therefore we regard him as worth it and we share him with others.

He's a mighty God and it goes on to speak about him as everlasting father, really interesting, unique designation of the Son, paralleling him with God.

The father, our lives are very impermanent, even his best. I know you young guys don't think that, but the older we get, the more impermanent it seems and the more fragile our hold in it is. Everything seems maybe even at a cultural level, very increasingly perishable.

But here we have a prophecy and a picture of Jesus which is the picture of stability. Jesus isn't going anywhere. He is everlasting.

[21 : 59] It's easy for us to ignore now, easy for us to marginalize. That's our dubious freedom. That's your dubious freedom in mind that we can ignore him.

But this is one who reveals himself as everlasting, the one whose rule is paternal, everlasting, in the best sense, who knows us, who longs for us to be reconciled, whose rule is just and compassionate in our lives, who loves and protects us, everlasting father.

And that for us, and the Lord's Day is a really good reminder of that for as we come. I know we regularly come. It's a routine. Sometimes you might think, oh, I'd rather do something else or be somewhere else.

But there's this great routine and stability that the Lord's Day gives us to remind us of the everlasting father who is our God and Savior and who will always be there. It's a mystery, especially in this world that is increasingly seemingly full of random life and choices, inexplicable evil and an unknown future.

He is the one who's everlasting. He's always there. He will never leave you or forsake you as a believer. Over-difficult and problematic circumstances seem to be for us.

[23 : 15] He knows, he governs, he rules over past, present and increasingly we will see in the future. There is this great stability and there is none, no stability and no belonging outside of Him.

We make and we mold and we create really bad everlasting fathers. We're not a good everlasting father, and the idols we make are not good everlasting fathers.

The things that we focus on and maybe trust in or hope to find our happiness and life and contentment and outside of Jesus Christ are not good. They're not great.

They will let us down ultimately. Even though for maybe quite a while we may cling to them. Everlasting father, and the last thing he says, and with this we close, is prince of peace.

This is a really great title for Jesus. Is there a verse for here? Luke chapter 2, 14, and this is from the Nativity account, the account of Jesus coming.

[24 : 32] One, you know, it's often repeated, isn't it, at this time of year. Carol serves and probably do it ourselves next week. Glory to God in the highest on earth, peace among those with whom He is pleased.

And there's this, the angels sing of the advent, the coming of Jesus Christ and often in terms of bringing peace and goodwill to all men. To all men, to all men, young men, young women, everyone, to all people.

The biblical concept of peace is often again much different from ours. Shalom, that's what it is, it's shalom. And it's more than just the absence of dispeace or the absence of war in human or in cultural terms.

It's a wholeness, that sense of peace. It's a well-being. It's coming to understand, it's coming home.

That's what it is, it's coming home. Coming home. It's understanding that this is where we are, in Christ, we've come home.

[25 : 41] You know, because the consequence of sin is dispeace. It is brokenness. It's that we've separated ourselves from the author of life and the author of love.

That's what we do, that's what sin is, that's what the chaos is. But it's that sense of peace that comes from being in this presence. You know, sometimes how it would, in shadowy form I guess, sitting on the edge of a Highland Lough on a summer night with just that quietness and that tranquility, all as well, well, until the midges come.

And that reminds us that hell will one day be. Okay, we remember that. Because the peace that we experience here is always temporary and is always shadowy.

But in Christ, even in the midst of the greatest turmoil, circumstantially in our lives, we are in Christ and we know peace because we've changed direction and there's a movement towards wholeness as He redeems and restores us towards peace.

To the future, which He also speaks about, which is the wiping away of every tear. There will be a day when He wipes away every tear and universal peace is realized.

[27 : 04] That is God's big picture. It's the big picture that we are in the midst of right now, that we are part of. We are not in a random universe.

We are not in a world that is out of control. See all the confusion and the difficulty, we see it from our side. It is not like that.

For God, as He works out His purposes, it's often been said, I don't know if I've used this illustration, but it's an old, old illustration of a weaving or of a carpet that's been woven.

That's not the right word. It's not a weaving as such. A tapestry. On the good side of the tapestry is a beautiful. It's beautiful, isn't it?

You can see what is there. But if you look at the back side of the tapestry or the weaving, it's all just a mishmash of knotted and colors and everything's chaotic.

[27 : 59] That's often how we see things. But God is the one who sees and is working at His great purpose. In Him, there is for us victory and joy.

There are joys before you as we join the harvest as they are glad when they divide the spoil. It's a great picture of happiness. So the Prince of Peace brings us that wholeness into our lives, and I do encourage you, if you're not a believer, to think about the claims, these Old Testament prophetic claims of Jesus that we have seen worked out in the New Testament, in the Nativity, in the Cross, in the Death, in the Resurrection, and in our own lives as believers who have been transformed.

It's sad, isn't it? Often we are joyless and kind of bored, and we choose to lurch back into that place of this peace because it's flashy or something, and we all do it.

And yet He wants to open our eyes to see more and more the joy and the peace that He gives us as we come to Him. And no more so when we celebrate the sacrament of baptism.

And baptism is that physical symbol, visual sign for us that Christ asks all new believers to participate in, and those who are believers to share with their children, that represents those who have come to faith to make that public profession in the mighty God.

[29 : 36] The child that was born, the Prince of Peace, the everlasting Father, the wonderful Councillor, died, who rose again to defeats in and death in our lives to offer us washing and cleansing a new life in the Spirit as He indwells us in our lives.

So we look forward just in a moment to Grace's baptism. If you're here today and you're not a believer, can I encourage you to think more about these claims, don't dismiss them as religious claptrap.

Do think about them, do come and speak to me afterwards if you want to speak a little bit more, we have tea and coffee and plenty of time. And consider why you are here today and maybe why God.

And as Sovereign Grace has brought you here this morning.