

**Sermon Series: “The HOPE of Christmas”**  
**“Peace”**  
**Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.**  
**Sunday, December 12, 2021**

In 1969 John Lennon and Yoko Ono did something unusual. They got in a bed for two weeks in Amsterdam, Netherlands and Montreal, Canada and started a non-violent protest movement called “Bed In” and sang a song where they sang over and over, “All we are saying, is give peace a chance”. And this was a “Bed-in for Peace”. Lennon was anti-establishment and anti-war, and wanted people to protest, but to do so peacefully, the way Ghandi protested. The thought was good, the desire for peace was very good, but the way to get peace was very limited. It is tragically ironic that a man who sought peace so faithfully himself died in a very violent way. The reason it was limited was it was in the main way peace was sought— through human efforts. E.g., I recall someone was evacuating for Hurricane Ida and she was getting very stressed out, and she thought she knew of a way to get peace in the midst of her stress; her way was to go to a bookstore and buy a self-help book. But this way of peace was, again, limited. The reason it was limited was because of the way she was looking for peace mainly through human efforts. Like John Lennon, she was looking for the way to peace within the human heart. Wouldn't it be nice if there were a way to peace with an unlimited power? The message of Christmas knows of such a power.

**CONTEXT:** The people of Judah are living in a dark time of the latter half of the 700s BC, but Isaiah sees light around the corner, a hope coming.

READ Isaiah 9:6-7. “Isaiah’s promise from the 700s BC of an extraordinary child reminds of Nathan the prophet’s promise from the Lord of a ruler from David’s line who would be a son to Him and his would be a kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-17). In line with the promise from Nathan is the promise of a child to come who would be known for bringing Shalom.” The Israelites were frightened, and they had good reason to be. The Assyrian Empire was on the move, and they usually got what they wanted. And they wanted all of the promised land of the Jews. So Isaiah gives them a word from the Lord of comfort, that peace is on the way— the Prince of Peace is coming, and His kingdom will be of endless peace! We all know what it is like to need a little peace. E.g., I recall that sometimes I go to a library to get a sense of peace and quiet and get some work done; I have told Elena that sometimes I feel that with two hours of work at a library I can get as much done as six hours at home or the office, because I am undistracted there and I have fewer temptations to do other things. Some of us go to libraries for peace, and we can find other places— like vacations at the beach or the mountains. But our Western cultural way of viewing peace of the mind is more narrow than the Jewish understanding of peace, or Shalom (שלום). The Jewish way of peace is one of all-encompassing of the human condition. One Hebrew lexicon translates Shalom as “peace, prosperity, well, health, completeness, safety”, and Shalom implies “the idea of unimpaired relationships with others and fulfillment in one’s undertakings”; Shalom is the sort of peace “that has its source in God. He is the one who will speak shalom to his people”; it is said to be “among the most important theological words” in the Old Testament (from G.L. Carr in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, p. 931). E.g., I recall when I was in high school, a Jewish student invited me and my

friends to her house for a party, and we noticed as we walked into the house that the footmat before the front door said, “Shalom”; we did not understand it fully at the time, but what a wonderful greeting at the front door of a house! E.g, I recall in the 1980s The UMC had a ministry in New Orleans called “Shalom Zone”, where it sought to bring economic and physical and spiritual peace to the neighborhoods; that is the type of ministry God calls us to bring to the world, isn’t it? This peace promised in Isaiah has its fulfillment in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

READ Romans 8:1-9. “In Romans 8, Paul began by making the vital point for the identity of the Christian: those who follow Jesus are not under condemnation, but rather are free!” It is important to note that the emphasis in v 1 is on the strong negative word “not at all, in no respect” (οὐδὲν), which is the first word of the sentence. Literally we read, “*Not at all* is there condemnation for those in Christ Jesus”. Paul has just shared in chapter 7 that with his mind he wants to follow God’s ways, but the law of sin continues to enter him and prevent him from being obedient to God. Who can save him from this body of death? V 25 of chapter 7 answers this: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” It is interesting that Christians in the secular culture often have a reputation for condemning of others. E.g., I recall about 12 years ago I was in a dialogue/debate with a panel of three Christians (myself and two professors from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) and a panel of three atheists; the subject was whether religion was a force for good or bad in the world. The atheists were united that religion was a force for bad in the world. After we all spoke, we encountered questions from the crowd, and one person asked me the pointed question whether I was condemning those on the atheist panel to hell, and I said that it was not my position to condemn anyone, that is God’s role, yet I can tell you how we can know for sure that we are going to heaven, and that is through Jesus Christ. But this is a key point-- without Jesus, God will condemn us. Many

people in mainline Protestant churches use very loose language that implies everyone is going to heaven and is right with God— phrases like, “Oh, we are all children of God, everyone in the world”, but this is untrue. Because we are rebels against God, sinners, we are in need of a Savior. And through Christ we are saved; we have gone from being condemned to not condemned at all! So Paul says here in v 2 that we are free from the law of sin and death. We in our Western culture understand freedom as freedom to do what we want to do. E.g., recently Brittany Spears was set free; she was under a legal conservatorship where, from what I understand, her father controlled her finances and career, and now that that conservatorship has been stopped, we see pictures of Brittany going on vacation in Mexico with her fiance and living it up. But this is not freedom in the biblical sense, which is more of a freedom to be that which we were created to be by God. E.g., I recall a part of the book by Becky Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World*, where she noted that she led a Bible study for those interested in the Christian faith on a college campus, and there came a part from John 4 where Jesus addresses a woman and tells her to get her husband, and she says she has no husband, and Jesus says what she says is true for she has had five husbands, and the man with whom she is now is not her husband! One of the girls in the Bible study was co-habiting with her boyfriend, and she realized that following Jesus meant separating her living situation, and she was very resistant to this and told Becky that, and then left. A few days later Becky was at the college dorm talking with some girls when a banging sound came as a girl was going through the door with suitcases in her hand, and it was that girl— and Becky went to her and asked if she had left her home with her boyfriend, and she told Becky basically, “Now I am actually coming home!” and she followed Jesus. Jesus set her free from the law of sin and death, free to be the woman God wanted her to be.

READ vv 3-9. “Furthermore, the identity of the Christian is someone who walks and thinks not according to the flesh, but rather according to the Spirit. What is the distinction here?” READ vv 5-6. The flesh is the natural, default way of thinking. E.g., a man walking on the beach with scantily clad women will be tempted to look at women in a lustful way. E.g., I recall a Seinfeld episode where George is at a child’s birthday party— he is dating the mother of the child— and all of a sudden someone yells, “Fire!”, and he panics and pushes out of his way an elderly person on a walker and runs out the house. What is going on here? Self-preservation, which is our natural default— it takes character to have a selfless concern for others when there is danger present. Another natural default for us is to be independent of God and live with ourselves in control. And this leads to death. Paul contrasted this with those living according to the Holy Spirit live for the Lord, have surrendered their lives to the Lord, have received Jesus’ death on the cross as payment for their sins, and thus have life and peace. This is the peace that “passes all understanding” that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus from Philippians 4:7. The world promises to give peace through education and money and power and family relationships, but it is a peace that is dependent on our circumstances. If the circumstances of our lives change, so does that peace. Jesus gives peace as the Prince of Peace, a peace that is endless, and is not dependent on our circumstances but dependent on our relationship to Him. Because of His death for our sins and resurrection, when we accept Him and live for Him, we have peace. E.g, this week I got my bill from Sewerage and Water Board, and it was a surprise— it is for \$811! This is about seven to eight times my normal bill. If I was not following Jesus, I would be tempted to get very angry about this, but the Lord helped me calm down. I drove to the Sewerage and Water Board office on Saint Joseph Street, calmly talked to a nice lady there, and she put it under investigation. So this, as of now, is not settled. But the Lord has put a

peace on me so that I trust Him with it, and I am fine. We all have circumstances that are out of our control, and many that are within our control, but the peace Jesus gives us is stronger than our circumstances, once we come under His umbrella of care and authority

“Do we live under condemnation or peace?” The choice is ours beloved. God offers us a beautifully wrapped gift of salvation. We can resist it and live in condemnation before Him, or we can open it and come under His umbrella of protection and salvation, where His peace guards our hearts and minds. I invite you to open His gift of salvation for peace. We will have peace with God, and then He will send us out to have peace with those in our lives. God is not calling us to be perfect and then come to Him, but rather to come to Him and He will begin the process of making us perfect.