

Unto Us He Reigns

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[0 : 00] Isaiah chapter 9, the easiest way to get across the country is to buy a plane ticket and fly.! It's not the most scenic way to do it. If there's a cloud coverage, you won't see anything.

But it is efficient. And most of us know the routine. You got the 311 bag and you can leave your shoes on now. Thank the Lord. Some love flying and some hate flying and some do it for a living. For most of her life, my oldest daughter Abby's flights have been unpredictable. She has an ear condition that sometimes the pressure change causes intense pain.

And sometimes it don't bother her at all. And if you know Abby, you understand that. Sometimes it bothers her, sometimes it don't. But if it does bother her, she'll let you know it. We were flying together once not long ago and the pain hit hard.

She was sitting at the window and there was a seat between us that was empty and I was sitting in the aisle. And we were at 30,000 feet. And she looked at me and said, Daddy, I can't do this.

[1 : 10] And I said, Honey, you don't have a choice. We are going to do it. And we're going to land this plane. So the fear that she gets is different than what some other people get when they fly.

Some people dread the takeoff. They just don't like leaving the ground. And some people don't like landing. They don't like rushing toward the ground. It don't really bother me a whole lot.

But what bothers me the most is turbulence. Because it comes out of nowhere. You hit an air pocket and drop. And what I've learned to do is pay attention to where I look and see what happens.

See, I watch the faces of the flight attendants. And when they tell them to buckle up and sit down, I look at their faces to see if they're whispering to one another and those type things.

If they're calm, I'm calm. Now, I found out since I believe that that they're actually trained to look calm even when they're freaking out. So that don't really help. But anyway, I also find comfort in the voice of the pilot.

[2 : 17] Because when the pilot comes on and says, All right, we're going to hit some turbulence. And there are going to be some air pockets. And it's going to be a little rough coming in. But we're steady. And he sounds confident.

And he sounds instructional on what he tells us to do. We know what to expect. And we know what to do. And it just kind of calms things.

Wouldn't it be nice if when turbulence hits our lives, if we had someone to look to for comfort, someone to look to for guidance?

I'm thankful today that we do. And that Prince of Peace came to us as a babe in a manger. He's the reason we celebrate Christmas.

And once again, I want you to listen to the prophet. Predict the coming of the Lord 700 years before his arrival.

[3 : 25] And notice how he introduces him. Isaiah chapter 9, 6 and 7 says, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.

And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness.

From this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord will do this.

This passage is weighty. It gathers up all that begins when Christ comes into the world. It encapsulates the totality of what will begin when Christ is born.

[4 : 27] It says, for under us a child is born. That means that Christ is born. He's human. A real boy in a real world, he came dependent.

He came limited. He came human. But he's also a son that's given. This didn't start in Bethlehem. This is the eternal son of God.

Given to us. He didn't stop being God. Humanity was added to him. Only God can bear the weight of sin, but only man can stand in our place.

He's the God man. Then it says, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. When a king was enthroned, a royal robe was draped across his shoulders.

It symbolized rule and authority. But with this king, it's more than just a robe. He bears the weight of the responsibility that he has been given.

[5 : 29] And that is the burden of redemption. He's bearing the weight of the sins of a fallen world upon his shoulders. He is our savior.

But he's not only our savior, but he is a wonder of a counselor. He knows what we need before we ask.

He is the mighty God. He has power over sin, death, and hell. And he has the power to save. He is everlasting father.

He will never leave us. He knows, can do all things, and remains forever.

Yet with all of those titles, my favorite title appropriates his position is this last one, and that is he's the prince of peace.

[6 : 29] I don't know anybody who likes scrapes and squabbles. I know people who have a tendency to get into it. Some just learn how to cause commotion. That's kind of what they do.

But even when they do that, they kind of wish it would stop. They just want to win. But peace is a good thing for all people. We're all in the need of peace.

And the gift of Christmas is, in Christ, is that we have peace. But that only comes through the prince of peace. He did everything that he did and does everything that he does so that we can have peace.

So I just want to tell you what we have this morning when we have the prince of peace. And just look at what scripture teaches us.

As it elaborates on the peace that we can find only in the Lord Jesus. In him we have a prevailing peace.

[7 : 36] In John chapter 14 through John chapter 16, Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples. He is preparing them for a time when he will no longer physically be present with them. And he promises them that the coming of the Holy Spirit, he promises them of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

And he assures them that he will be in their presence. He speaks of his prevailing presence even after his ascension. And he closes that out by saying in John 16, 33, In me you may have peace. In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart. I have overcome the world. Now the tribulation that he speaks of in this passage is not talking about some end time, certain number of year kind of tribulation.

No, no, no. He's talking about the stuff that we deal with every day of our life. The pains and the sorrows and the difficulties that we deal with every day of our life.

And sometimes on the worst days of our life. It's been a rough week.

[8 : 53] It really has. I spent the first part of the week one day afternoon going to a father's funeral. One lost his father.

A good, godly man. That went on to be with the Lord. And he buried his beloved dad. And the next day I got a call.

That somebody had tragically, quickly lost their son. And tried to walk through that with that family. Through their celebration of life for him this week.

It's been a rough week. There's tribulation. Trials and difficulties in our lives. That are tough to walk away.

To walk through. You can't really walk away from it. It goes with you. It hangs out. And so he tells us. And he knows this, by the way.

[9 : 55] He knows all those things. Take heart. I've overcome the world. And when he says that, he's not only talking about some world power.

He's talking about whatever this world has. Whatever it throws at you. He can handle that. I want you to understand that peace is not an end of conflict.

It's not. It is his presence in the midst of that conflict. It is his presence in the midst of that stress. It is his presence in the midst of that difficulty.

And when he says that he has overcome, that means that he's won through the cross. And in him, because if we've given our lives to him, in his victory, we find victory. In him we win too. The empty tomb is the evidence of our triumph of the Lord. There's a prevailing peace that he gives us. But not only that, but scripture also teaches that we have a perpetual peace.

[10:59] It does not go away. I mean, listen, we may stray, but God's not going anywhere. We may not feel his presence in times in our lives.

But he's not went anywhere. Your feelings are not the basis of the truth of the presence of God. Understand that.

He's beyond that. I want you to listen to how Paul closes out the second letter to the Thessalonians. He's saying, 2 Thessalonians 3, 16, he says, Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times, in every way the Lord be with you all.

He says, at all times. Do you know what that means? In the Greek, that means at all times. That's what it means. It means every season of your life, everything that you go through, in every way, in every situation that we find ourselves in, he's always there.

Our peace is not found in the absence of conflict or loss or the absence of hardship. It's found in the perpetual presence of the Lord.

[12:18] He's not going anywhere. He's right there with you. He's anchored into the believer's life, and we should be anchored into him. And as unstable as this world is, the Lord is always stable.

He's always steady. He's always faithful. He's a perpetual peace. But not only that, but Scripture also teaches us that we have a poised peace in Christ.

I want you to listen to how Isaiah writes about this in Isaiah 26, verse 3. He says, You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you.

If I were to spin around real fast in this spot right here on this stage, I'd probably fall off. And the reality is most of you would laugh quicker than you would get up and help.

And that's sad, but that's the truth. But have you ever seen how fast a ballet dancer or a figure skater can spin and never lose their balance?

[13:33] They use a technique called spotting. And when they spin, they fix their eyes on one unmoving point.

Maybe it's a spot on the wall or a mark in the room. And as they turn their bodies, the head rotates last as their eyes are fixed on that one spot.

And then they keep that fixed as long as possible. And then when necessary, they quickly snap their head around and find that same spot again.

And good ones do it very effectively. When life is spinning and times are tough and circumstances are turning fast, peace does not come from life slowing down to a stop because it don't do it.

It don't. It comes when we fix our eyes on Jesus in the midst of the turns. He is stable. And we can be stable when we look to him.

[14:51] But not only do we have a poised peace, but we also have a peculiar peace. Jesus is clear in John 14 that the peace that he gives us is not like the world can give.

If you don't believe that, watch the news. Because world peace is fragile and it's temporary. Calm for a time, but built on a false sense of hope.

However, the peace of Christ is different. The peace of Christ is not just a mere distraction. Jesus offers rest.

He removes our fears. He removes our doubts. Peace comes when he speaks. When he looked at the raging sea, he said, peace be still. And all those choppy waters calmed immediately. And with that same power and with that same voice, he can speak into our lives of a believer.

In the struggle and in the storms that are overwhelming us. And somehow give a sense of calm in the midst of that. But I want to be clear, that does not come for everyone.

[16:06] I call it a peculiar peace because peculiar is a word that's used twice in the King James Version. Once it's used in 1 Peter and once it's used in Titus.

And when we think of the word peculiar, it normally means strange or odd or awkward. Some of y'all may know what that means.

There's even a South Carolina word that when I used this in Mississippi, they looked at me kind of strange. But some of y'all know what I'm talking about when I say choir. Just kind of choir, you know. It's not queer.

Choir. Just kind of choir. They say that to you and you're not from here. It's just strange, awkward. It's just kind of choir, you know. Biblically, that's not what it means.

Biblically, it means one's own possession. Something that's different because it's set apart as a treasure. You can't have the peace of Christ apart from a relationship with Christ.

[17:20] You can't. If he had not come as a babe, there'd be no relationship to have with him. But he has come. And because he's come, we have that opportunity.

And that peace is only found in him. Have no fear. This peace is not elusive. Scripture teaches us that not only is it for us who come in Christ, but it is also promised.

It is a promised peace. John 14, 27. Jesus said, 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 it be afraid. Listen, I try my best to give comfort to those who are hurting.

Try to find the words to say. Most of the time I spend a lot of time quiet. Because I've heard a lot of preachers say dumb stuff and I don't want to say something dumb.

[18:29] I just shouldn't not say anything. Sometimes presence is the best. But I want you to know that whatever you go through, whatever you face, I'm well aware that I, as good as he is, Brian, Jeff, anybody on this staff, we can't give you a real sense of wholeness and completeness and peace like the Lord Jesus can.

Matter of fact, all I want to do is point you to Christ because he's the one that provides that for you and he promises it. And so you can rest in that.

There's times that feels shaky, but I believe you can rest in that. The word for peace there is shalom and it means wholeness and it means completeness. Augustine of Hippo wrote this.

He said, you may, you have made us for yourself, oh Lord, and our hearts are, is, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

That's where we find our hope. And, and when we hope in him, we find peace. And it is my prayer for you this Christmas that you find your peace in Christ.

[19:56] Now let's go back to the text and look at verse seven. It says, of the increase of his government and of his, of the peace, there'll be no end on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

What, what began as Christ's birth did not stop at his death. His resurrection did not stop it. His ascension into heaven did not stop it.

Christ rule and reigns today in the hearts and the lives of believers and one day he'll rule on this earth and all will know of his rule and reign and it cannot be stopped. It will not be slowed.

It will not be hindered. It will not be bothered. It will not be compromised. It speaks of justice. He is just and he displays justice.

It speaks of righteousness. He is right and he displays righteousness. Forever. forever. And you say, preacher, how in the world does that happen?

[21:05] Well, this is the best part. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. This is not something that we can concoct.

I am thankful for those who came after the first of December and decorated this sanctuary and this facility so beautifully. Thank you for all that effort.

And I am thankful for those who help us to have the fellowships that we have and do all the background work that nobody even sees to make it all special.

thank you. And the choir and the orchestra and the drama team and the tech team and the children and the youth, didn't they just blow us away?

I mean, just absolutely. My mom and dad came Sunday night and on the front porch she said, my mama said, I'm ready to go to heaven now. And I said, not right now, mama, go to the car.

[22:09] It was wonderful. And I've tried my best through something that a man said about 2,700 years ago about the hope that we'd have in Christ and point you to Christ.

But I want to be clear. In all our efforts, we can't concoct.

We can't drum up. We can't do what only God can do. We can't make it happen. God's plan is humanly impossible.

And because of that, many have a hard time believing it is possible because they can't see it. They don't place their faith in Christ because they don't see it happening.

They want to see it. Well, it's happening. And it's not just coming from us. Scripture says the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

[23 : 30] Zeal there means deep, heartfelt passion. It's a fervent passion. It's a focused passion. It's not always loud. It's not showy.

It's deep and it's settled and it's real. This is the passion that God has as he carries out his will. This is the passion that he has for us.

This is why he sent his son to be born of a virgin. This is why Christ lived a sinless life. This is why he died a sinner's death. That is the zeal that raised him from the dead and the same zeal that will bring him back on a cloud to receive us to be where he is.

That is why he is as we've talked about unto us. There's no need for you today to doubt the zeal of the Lord.

He is passionate for you. It is unquestionable. This is the question. What about your heartfelt fervor for him?

[24 : 40] Do we have a zeal for Christ? I'm talking about a life-changing zeal. Do we have a passion for Christ? I mean, do we really want him to rule and reign in our lives?

Not to let us have it our way and bless our efforts along the way, but instead to give up on our way and say, God, I want to go your way. I want to have a passion and a zeal that changes my life and my perspective of how I look to you.

Do you want him to have his way in your life? Do you really trust his counsel? He is a wonder of a counselor.

Do you really stand not in your strength, but in his might? He's a mighty God. Hard question. Do you trust his timing?

He is the everlasting father. He's already in your tomorrows. Do you rest in his peace?

[26 : 01] For he is our prince. With the zeal that he has for us, my hope this Christmas is may our lives not just for Christmas, but well beyond that, may our lives show our zeal for him because when we get passionate about the Lord and ask him to rule and reign in our lives, to guide us and we'll follow his direction, to lead us and we won't buck along the way.

But we'll try our best to carry out what God would have for us. Do you know how his will will be done in your life?

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. With every head bowed and every eye closed, has there ever been a time in your life when you asked the Lord Jesus to forgive you and to come into your life and to save you?

It's where it all begins. And with that bond, a precious bond, an empowerment and a strengthening that will carry you.

And sometimes you won't sense that carry, and I'll tell you, in hard times you won't sense that carry. You'll look back and you'll see how God was with you all the way. The evidence will be there.

[27 : 56] But it begins with a commitment to follow him, a surrender of your life to follow him. If you've done that, have you ever acknowledged that publicly? Have you ever let other people know that?

Is it just something private within you? The Bible's clear by Christ's example and by his commission that we are to let other people know about that through baptism.

What better gift to give at Christmas time than your life to Christ and your commitment to follow him and his will for your life to publicly acknowledge him through baptism?

Either one of those things has never happened to you. I encourage you to come during this invitation. Maybe you're here this morning and God's leading you to Pickens First Baptist Church. You're not a member and you feel drawn to be here. This is the place that God would have you to serve. I encourage you to come and follow the Lord in that. God's love and for the rest of us.

[29 : 03] What is it in our lives that hold us back from being as passionate for the Lord Jesus as he is for us? Besides our own fragile humanity?

are there hindrances in our life today that we need to lay down before him and give over to him to be everything that he'd have us to be?

To live with a zeal that only he can give us? Whatever that is today give it to him. Lay it down. You can do that where you stand in just a moment.

You can do it at this altar. I'll be happy to pray with you whatever it is. May your zeal for Christ mark your life. Lord Jesus lead us right now to be obedient to follow any way you'd lead us Father I pray

in Jesus name.
Amen.