

THE PRINCE OF PEACE IS JESUS

Second in an Advent Series: "Jesus, the Light of the World" –December 9, 2012 –Philippians 4: 4-7

The Church of the Covenant

What is the secret to having peace at the center of our lives even and especially when there is no peace all around us? How can we have peace in the midst of times of storm in our lives? How can the birth of the Prince of Peace into our life and into our heart this Christmas make all the difference in the world?

I was traveling in Africa on a mission trip with members of my church and we were in Zimbabwe. It corresponded to a time when there was the confiscation of farms being carried out by the government and there were armed groups of army veterans, armed government thugs really, in makeshift camps along major roads who would randomly stop cars and buses just to harass folks. It was chaos all around and perhaps even a little dangerous, but we were traveling with two seasoned missionaries, Bill and Nancy Warlick, so I felt rather confident. We were traveling from Zimbabwe to Zambia and along the way we were to see Victoria Falls, one of the great natural wonders of the world. But the missionaries were warned in a dream to go another way; and sure enough the "armed veterans" were at the border crossing closest to Victoria Falls, held a busload of Methodist women captive for a couple of days, and we would have been right in the thick of it, had we gone the planned route. Instead, we stayed at a Christian guest house, overlooking Lake Victoria, called MOST HIGH. It was named for Psalm 91 –*"He who dwells in the shelter of the MOST HIGH, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust." (Psalm 91: 1)* Those who dwell in the shelter and the refuge and fortress of the MOST HIGH GOD will have a place of peace in their life. Rumors of war and chaos all around but when we were staying at the shelter of MOST HIGH all you could see was the perfectly placid and pristine lake. My ministry back in Virginia was chaotic and nothing seemed to be going right but there at MOST HIGH guest house It was calm and serene. You seemingly could look out across the lake and see forever. The sunlight of eternity danced across the undisturbed lake. There is not so much as a wave on the lake. MOST HIGH stood on an extraordinarily high precipice overlooking the lake, surrounded by trees and calm and silence. There was not a noise. The silence was perfect. It is my quiet place...in my mind...

I think everyone needs a quiet place to go when all about them is chaos and emotion and may feel like life itself is warring against us. For me, that place is MOST HIGH. I go there in my mind and in my thoughts and in my prayers. And I recapture the serenity of that moment. Surrounded by war and violence and harm at MOST HIGH there is shelter and refuge and peace. It doesn't take away the chaos all around me. No that is still there. But it gives me an inner peace in my heart regardless of my outer circumstances. I think that is the essence of the meaning of our scripture for today from the New Testament book of Philippians –*"And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4: 7) The Apostle Paul here is speaking of an inner peace, the peace of God, which we can possess through Christ Jesus. It is not a logical peace. In other words, it is a peace which passeth understanding; it is beyond reason; it is a peace which is not logical to possess. The outward world is chaotic, destructive; there are many forces which seek to suck us down into the vortex of despair and disbelief and discouragement. Our outward circumstances logically would mean any logical, normal rational individual would feel this way –discouraged, disbelieving and despairing. But we still have inner peace anyway. Its not logical; its not rational; its not reasonable to possess this peace. It is not a peace that comes from us; it comes from outside of us. It comes from God. Its not ours; it's a gift. It is, in Paul's lively and evocative phrase, *"the peace of God, which passes all understanding..."* (v. 7) It is a place like MOST HIGH. It is a place of shelter and peace in the eye of the storms of life. And spiritually speaking a Christian can train themselves to go to that place. When all

about us seems chaos then we can go to MOST HIGH in our minds; we can go into the shelter of the MOST HIGH God spiritually; we can enter into the fortress and refuge of the peace of God which passeth understanding in prayer. We can train our heart and our mind to do this.

Where is that place in your mind of shelter and refuge and peace for you? Where is MOST HIGH for you? By the way, if you ever see me close my eyes and sort of phase out in the middle of a church meeting, especially one where we are disagreeing, you can be pretty sure exactly where I am in that moment –I’m in Africa, overlooking a placid lake, surrounded by the MOST HIGH, in a place where I possess a peace which passeth understanding, a gift of God. We dwell in the shelter of the MOST HIGH God because Jesus Christ dwells within our heart through faith. *“He is our peace”*, says the scripture in Ephesians (Ephesians 2: 14) The prophet Isaiah predicts His advent and birth by saying that HE, Jesus, is *“The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9: 6)* It is through His birth and His life and His death and His resurrection that we have PEACE with God and when we have PEACE with God, when we are reconciled with the CREATOR of the universe, it is then we can have peace with one another, and it is then we can be at peace within ourselves. THE PRINCE OF PEACE IS JESUS. It is HE we meet in the shelter of the MOST HIGH. It is His peace we possess when we have no peace of our own. When we enter into our quiet place; when we still our souls and quiet our hearts and halt all the jangled thinking within our minds, it is the Prince of Peace who we meet in the quiet place of refuge reserved for us by the MOST HIGH God.

Now I believe that Christmas is intended for us by God to be just such a refuge of peace in our life. But we have not made it so; we have created it in our own image to be a place and a time of stress and too much activity, and about buying stuff, and getting ourselves all whipped up to a place where the slightest thing can anger us, and take away our peace, and destroy the very relationship that God seeks to restore through His Son, Jesus. Bethlehem...Christmas...is supposed to be for us the ultimate “MOST HIGH” place for us to go for refuge and for peace and to possess the peace of God which passeth understanding. Man was not made for Christmas –we are not to be enslaved by doing and activity and stress and a lack of peace. Rather, Christmas has been made for Man –it is to be a place where we go in our heart and in our mind and spiritually and in prayer, to become restored, to be sheltered, to have a place of refuge and a peace which is illogical. It should be for us a place like MOST HIGH...

Think about Christmas this way –we draw near to the manger. It is a quiet, peaceful place. The night is calm and bright. The busy world is hushed and the fever of life has calmed for one brief, shining moment. The Prince of Peace is born in peace, sheltered by the MOST HIGH God. The world is in turmoil; the world is seeking to revolt from the Romans. Everyone has been uprooted for a census in order to be taxed. At the worst time, when Mary is great with child, she and her betrothed are forced to take a long and difficult journey. Outward circumstances make for no peace. But there at Christmas the light of the Star of Bethlehem is quietly shining in the night sky. All is calm; all is bright. Silent night; Holy night. The peace of God which passeth understanding, the Prince of Peace is born in Bethlehem.

Now for the question –Is Christmas for you more a time of stress, and busy obligation and a lack of peace? Or is it for you more a place where you go to find again the peace of God which passeth understanding? Go to your quiet place. Go to MOST HIGH. Go to Bethlehem. Have the Prince of Peace born into your heart this year. Have the quiet light of a new star shine into your heart. **The Prince of Peace is Jesus.** What have we made of Christmas? Why have we no peace???????

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*