

War and Peace

Revelation 21:1-22:5

Key Verse: 21:3-4

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death” or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

This is our second sermon about Advent. If you remember, the word “advent” simply means “arrival” and the Advent season is a celebration of the arrival of the baby Jesus. This year, there are 24 days to celebrate with eager anticipation of the arrival of Jesus and his second arrival, which is still to come. Last week, Mike talked about hope from Isaiah chapters 8 and 9. In those chapters, the nation of Israel is shown to be in deep darkness and unwilling to call on the name of their God. However, those living in darkness will see a great light and that light is the light of men, the light salvation. That light is hope because a child is born to redeem all mankind and set all things right. We have hope for better, we have hope that pain does not last and tear-stained cheeks will bear a smile once again. How is this possible? How can we say that pain and frustration will cease to exist? How can we say that the fiscal cliff is nothing more than the curb on the street? Isaiah 9 spoke of a war being over and victory at hand. And this week, we are going to delve deeper into this concept of peace. Isaiah 9 said that the baby born to us would be the Prince of Peace and today’s passage will show us the ultimate realization of that peace.

Before we can really talk about peace, though, we need to talk about war. Some people think that the greatest novel ever written was Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. It is a hefty novel with around 1500 pages, of which I’ve read about 15. The backdrop of the novel is Napoleon’s invasion of Russia. It is a novel about how war changes people. It causes some to doubt and others to become emboldened. Although it can be romanticized, war is brutal and unnerving, as some of you here have experienced first hand. The price of war is life and it can last a varying amount of time. From current conflicts like the year-old civil war in Syria and the eleven-year-old war in Afghanistan, to long-gone wars like the Hundred Years War or the Punic War between Rome and Carthage, war and battle have cost countless lives, including up to 75 million in World War II alone. However, the oldest and most costly war still rages on. It is a war in which everyone who has ever lived is a combatant. There are billions of people who have been lost since the first man and first woman declared war on their God.

Our passage today comes from the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. I don’t know about you, but I’ve never heard many sermons from this book first hand. The passage today shows us the final peace and the end of the great war with God. This start of this war is recorded in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Turn with me to Genesis, we’ll focus on chapter 3. Prior to this chapter it is recorded that God created everything, including a man and a woman and it was really good. God put these people into a beautiful garden, and there was no shame, no pain, and no separation from God. The people lived in the garden and literally walked with God. God would take strolls through the trees and he provided everything that the man and woman would need and he gave them only one rule: not to eat from a certain tree. God wasn’t doing this to withhold something from them, but to protect them from the consequences of eating the fruit of that tree.

God loved the man and woman so much, but a serpent came to cast doubt on God’s love by asking some tantalizing questions. He asked, “Does God not let you eat from the

trees?” and the woman answered, “No, we can eat the fruit from the trees, but we can’t eat from the tree in the middle of the garden and not touch it, or we will die.” Then the serpent said, “That’s not true. God knows that if you eat from it, you’ll be like him and he doesn’t want that.” Then the woman thought the fruit looked good and ate some and gave it to her husband too. Once they took a bite, their world changed. They were filled with shame and went to hide. When God came around, he called out to the hidden man, “Where are you?” and it was soon revealed that they disobeyed God’s only command. They didn’t trust God and with one thought and one bite, sin entered and the war began. God cursed the serpent, the woman and the ground, and both the man and women were sent out of the perfect garden. God said to the man, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3:17-19) Notice that God does not curse the man, but the ground. God knows how to strike a blow that counts.

In an instant, pain and strife entered because humanity sinned walked away from God. Not long after that the first son of the man and woman killed his brother because of jealousy. The war escalated so quickly. What was once a small border dispute grew into an all out war, because one man destroyed one of God’s creations. And the war with God has many different fronts, as we can see today. There are surgical strikes that try to deny the existence of God, hatred that destroys all of his creation, the battle in the heart to do good and not evil, and the pride that places us above the almighty God. We rage against God blaming him for all our problems. We point fingers at what God has not done and forget his greatness and goodness. Also, when we argue and are bitter towards our brothers and sisters, we think that we are God and want things to be in our image and not God’s image. We want for things to be how we like them and not how God made them. We are so internally focused that we forget that the world does not revolve around us. Most of our relationships are based on what we receive; what can this relationship do for me. When we are not satisfied by what we hear or see, we write them off and want nothing to do with them anymore. “I’m not getting anything out of this relationship. All I get is hurt and pain, so why even bother anymore?” Sadly, this is why so many marriages end in divorce.

Also, when we see people running after money and things, that is also the war on God. God is to be the object of our affections. He is the object of our worship, but people will go to unheard of lengths for money and wait in line for days for the latest shiny trinket. It’s Christmastime right now and this greed is in full swing. Giving gifts is to be reminiscent of God giving the greatest gift to us in the form of a baby in manger, but it becomes about what we can get. Giving gifts is not the focus, getting gifts is. I have people asking me what I would like for Christmas, and honestly, I don’t know, but I feel bad because I don’t know. In my head, I think that I should want things and be able to freely let someone know about it. I feel like there is something wrong with me because I can’t instantly rattle off what I want, but that is just an illusion of the war. Sometimes we talk about a spiritual war, but it’s not a war between God and Satan. Satan already knows that he cannot win against God, but there is a war between God and us because we are too proud and too dumb to realize that we can’t win against God. We want to be like God (that’s a part of that original sin) and we elevate ourselves into that position in our own heads. We become the authority of everything. We like to have the last say in our lives. We like to deny who is truly our master, and each of us is a casualty of our own personal war with God.

In this war, we are our own worst enemy. We inflict the worst case of friendly fire on ourselves as we constantly shoot ourselves in the foot. Think about it. How many of your decisions have left you wounded and in pain? How many times have you done something to hurt you? There was one time where I would take out student loans to pay for things. I thought it was a great idea because I wouldn't have to pay it back for a long time. In the end, I racked up a six-figure student loan debt, and it is a terrible burden now for my whole family. I made the stupid decisions that put me here. In my quest to get what I want, I could have very easily killed myself. You might wonder what is that a war against God? Didn't I just make stupid decisions? Well, you are right, but I put myself in the number one position. I put my desires and myself in the place where God should be. God's throne is to be in the heart of every person, but I tried to overthrow him and kick him out of the throne of my heart. I would call that waging war on God and that how the war manifests itself in many of our lives.

Quite honestly, I don't know what I am truly thinking when I act like that. God created me and he created the whole universe from nothing. How am I supposed to fight against that? If God wanted to, he could wipe me out with a mere thought. I am about as powerful as an ant is to a boot, but that doesn't stop me from marking up my battle lines and begin the planning to overthrow the king. In every nation on the planet, this is called treason and is punishable by death. Certainly, God in his might and justice can just wipe me from existence, but strangely, he doesn't. God can win the war outright. Instead, God sent a baby boy to win the war. God has an army of angels but to win the war, a king without a crown came down...a boy without a bed gives life to the dead. It seems so strange that this would be the way to end the war, but it is. The baby boy is the child that is born in Isaiah 8 and 9. The baby boy is Jesus who would, one day, die the death that we were due because we were fighting against God. Jesus took our bullet and he jumped on the grenade so that we could live. Jesus died in the war so that the war could finally end and peace would reign. And this isn't some short-term peace like we see between Palestine and Israel today. There a cease-fire is announced and the fighting stops for a short while. However, very soon, the fighting starts back up again and we are back where we started. God's peace is different because when he says the war is over, he means it. God doesn't stab us in the back and he makes sure that we don't renege and start the war up again.

The baby Jesus marks the first coming of the peace, but it won't be fully realized until Jesus returns. When he comes back the order of all things will be restored and the curse that was given in Genesis will be completely undone. God will make all things new. That's the passage that we get to today in Revelation. Our passage begins, "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." (21:1-2) In the fullness of peace this broken world will pass away and a new earth and a new heaven will be created and God's great city will come down from heaven to this new earth and this new earth and new city will be special. "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (21:3-4) Here we see what the result of this peace is. God will once again dwell with the people. Just like in the Garden of Eden, God will live among the people, his former enemies. That's amazing. Usually when there is war, one side is intent on destroying the other, but God's intention is that he would live with those who want to usurp him.

It's more than that, though. Verse 4 says that there will be no more pain or mourning or crying or pain and God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Remember, we are the ones that cause ourselves so much pain and grief. It was because of our sin that the world degenerated into the miserable place that we see. God cursed the world because of Adam's sin and the world has been broken ever since. The sin of man brings misery and pain. All of the pain and suffering that we see and experience is because of the sins that humanity commits, but in the new heaven and the new earth, those things are no more. Death entered the world because of sin, but Jesus solves the sin problem and death no longer has any power. There will be no more mourning because there is no more death. Pain will be a thing of the past and crying will have no more purpose. The scars that you bear will be finally healed. The fear of insignificance will be gone. The emotional baggage that fills your heart will be lifted from your shoulders. The intense loneliness will melt away as you are united with Christ. We get these things in varying measure now, but the fullness of peace comes when Jesus comes again.

The passage continues, "He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.'" (21:5-8) Everything will be new; everything will be restored. There will not be anything of this old, broken world that remains. God is the beginning and the end of everything and to those who are thirsty, God will provide them a drink of life. We will be called God's own children, which is amazing since rage against him now, in war. But those who persist in their war against God will be put in hell and forever tormented and forever in pain and anguish. This isn't a guarantee for everyone. Only those who repent and accept that Jesus put an end to the war will have this peace.

In this new age, the City of God is amazing. The remainder of chapter 21 deals with what the new city is like. I'm not going to quote much here but take a look in your Bibles. The great city will come down from heaven. The city is not something that was made by man, but by God himself and it will shine like a jewel with twelve gates and twelve foundations for the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Jesus. One of the things that I notice about the city is that it is huge. It is as tall as it is wide and long. The Bible says the city is 12,000 stadia length, which my footnote says is around 1400 miles, which is half the distance across the country. If you do the math, 1400 miles by 1400 miles is 1.96 million square miles, which is more than half the size of the US, which is 3.79 million square miles. That is one big city and it is even bigger when you see that it is as tall as it is wide. The city will be 1400 miles tall. Let's think about that for a moment. The tallest building in Chicago is around 1400 feet tall. That means that the city of God will be over 5000 times taller. The International Space Station orbits the earth at an average altitude of 211 miles and the old space shuttles never ventured beyond 250 miles. The tallest point in God's city is seven times higher than the International Space Station. This city is tremendously massive. It is at a scale that we cannot comprehend.

The city's wall is nearly 200 feet thick and made of jasper and the entire city is made of gold. Each of the city's twelve foundations is made of a different precious jewel and each of the twelve gates is made of a single pearl. The streets are paved with the purest gold. When you look at this city, everything in it is made of the most precious material that we know and in it's

purest form. The most precious materials that we know are merely building materials like granite, concrete, brick and steel. And like the Bible says, it is completely pure. Nothing in our current world is 100% pure. We can find things that are 99.999999% pure, but it is never 100%, but in God's city everything will be 100% pure.

Beyond that, there will be no temple to worship God, because God and Jesus will be the temple. There is no reason to go to a church to worship a proxy of God because we will have God himself in front of us. We can go directly to him. Also there will be no sun or moon to give light, because God will light the world and there will never be any darkness because God is light and his is always on. Also, the Bible says that nothing impure will ever enter the city. None of the brokenness that currently exists will be able to enter into the city. There will be no shame and no deceit. This city will not be corrupt and the government workers will actually do their job and be helpful. There will be no lies or broken promises. There will be no one who is out for themselves. A couple of days ago I heard that the presidential candidates spent over 2 billion dollars campaigning. That's a lot of money that I think a lot of us could be put to better use, but this won't happen in God's city. There will be no elections because we are all the elect. Every complaint that we have will be excised.

The wonderful thing about God's new peace is that it is complete. If you read this passage, it almost reads like Genesis 3 in reverse especially when you get to chapter 22. Let me read it. "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever." (22:1-5) Like in Genesis, there is a river of life that goes through the city and the tree of life is there too. Humanity was allowed to eat from this tree before the war began, but God prevented the man and woman from getting to the fruit after they had sinned, because a sinner that could live forever would do terrible things. But in God's new city, the tree of life produces fruit all year round for twelve month and its leaves will bring healing. Our wounds will be mended and our disfigurements will be removed. We will be pure.

Plus, there will no longer be any curse. When man sinned, God cursed the ground and we would have to work it to eat. Before the curse food was plentiful and work was a joy, but afterwards, work became painful toil with so many thorns and thistles that we get cut up every time we work. If you have coworkers that love to play office politics at the expense of everyone or a boss that is like a dictator, that comes from the curse on the ground and it is so painful to toil in those environments. Praise God that those things are temporary and in his new city, that curse will be lifted and there will be no painful toil and the tree of life will provide all the food that we need. It will be provided to us without the backbreaking work, just like in the days before the fall.

God's place will be with man and his throne will be right there. This is one of the clearest indications that the war will be over and that peace will reign for ever and ever. I don't know about you, but the sight of this peace gives me a lot of hope. I know that we all feel burdened, fearful, uncertain, and hopeless when we dwell on our situations. We've got people without jobs wondering how they will support their families and give gifts this Christmas. We have people

with debilitating pain that essentially immobilizes them. We've got people who are so alone that they are brought to tears during the holidays. I've had all of those. I lost my job just before my wife and I married and wondered how to support this new family and now my income is barely enough to survive. I get random pain in my knees that sometimes makes it extremely hard to walk and constantly discourages me from running, and I have felt so alone and thought that no one cares about me and that if I was not around, no one would notice. But there will be a day when none of these things will exist any more. I will not have any pain or anguish or worry because God will dwell with me. He will be the source of my light. He will be the object of my worship. He will be my glory.

The greatest and most wonderful thing about all this is that since this new heaven and new earth...this holy and great city...is eternal, its effects reach back to us even now. We are citizens of the great city and God dwells with us now. He is our light, our glory, and the one we worship. The peace that we see in the city, we can have even now while we are living in the broken world that is filled with sin, and it is all because of that baby boy. There is a new song called *Baby Boy* (and we put a link to the YouTube video on our Facebook page) that opens, "If you told me all about your sorrows I'd tell you 'bout a cure If you told me you can't fight the battle There's a baby boy who won the war The war was won by a baby boy Alleluia We can sing it Alleluia Heaven's ringing Alleluia Endless hope, relentless joy Started with a baby boy". There is hope in the peace of God that transcends all understanding, and it is coming and it is here.