

Topic	The Advent of Heavenly Peace
Reference	Isaiah 2
Date	2 December 2019
Speaker	Dr Peter Ng

So today we're going to look at Isaiah chapter 2 starting of the Christmas season. Advent is the coming of heavenly peace, we are going to talk about heavenly peace today. In fact, that song is a very special song. In 2011 it was granted by UNESCO as a cultural heritage. 1914 Christmas Eve, Britain and Germany were at war. In the middle of that conflict, within the deep in the trenches of Europe, one man, Walter Kirschhoff, tenor of the Berlin opera sang about heavenly peace in Silent Night. And when he sang this in German and then in English, the British side, his enemies also reciprocated by singing the same song and both sides got up out of their trenches, dropped their guns and shook hands and rediscovered their humanity, that both sides on either side of the barrel of a gun, there are same human beings.

And that's the experience that we each yearn to have. At the end, it would take another world war. At the end of that world war, they formed the United Nations, this quest of heavenly peace and outside the United Nations headquarters you will see an image of a man who is taking a hammer and he's trying to beat his sword into a plow share. And at the bottom of this monument is emblazoned these words

..and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

That is taken from Isaiah, today's passage and today I am going to take you down this passage because it's such an important passage because it undergirds all of our understanding of what life is really about.

1. SHALOM IS GOD'S VISION FOR US.

Isaiah 2:1-2 (ESV)

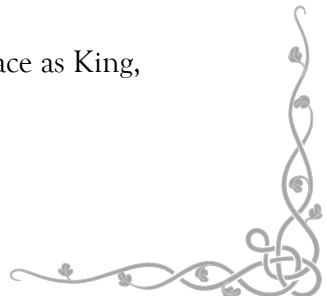
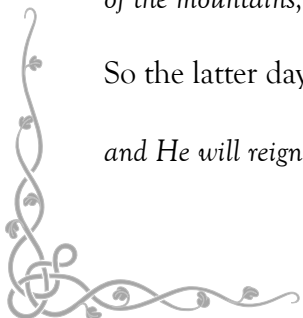
The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

Here we have the people of Judah and Jerusalem in a tight spot when Isaiah wrote this. They had already taken the Northern Kingdom and they were banging on the doors of Judah and Jerusalem. It's only by the skin of their teeth they were saved because the Lord sent a disease upon Sennacherib, the Assyrian commander and hundreds of thousands died and he ran away. They were saved, but a hundred years later on, BC 596 or 597 they were eventually taken into exile. And so this is a message of son of Amoz, Isaiah to Judah and Jerusalem.

2 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains,...

So the latter days refer to the end times where God will come and reign in his rightful place as King,

and He will reign in the mountains of the Lord.



The mountains are always important in biblical literature because mountains are the sites of transcendent spiritual experience. You experience God in the mountain. Many, many religions have their temples in the mountain.

- The garden of Eden was on a mountain.
- Abraham sacrificed at Mount Moriah.
- Moses had the burning bush in the mountain.
- Elijah had his clash with the priests at the mountain.
- The law was given at Sinai.
- Jesus was transfigured in the mountain.
- Jesus was tempted on the mountain.
- Jesus gave the great commission on the mountain in Galilee.
- Jesus ascended from Mount Olives

Isaiah 2:2 (ESV)

*It shall come to pass in the latter days that **the mountain of the house of the Lord** shall be established as the highest of the mountains,*

If you look at Mount Olives, it's not the highest, but it is a spiritual term that it is the highest mountain

*and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, 3 and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the **mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God** of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of **Zion** shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

So you can see it in the Mountain of the Lord, the house of the Lord and Zion are all equivalent concepts. So Isaiah is actually challenging the people of God to come and experience Him. That is what he's trying to challenge them to do. And when he comes all the nations shall flow to it. It's like a picture of, you know, when you have got the explosion of the volcano, where does the lava flow bottom up or top up? Top down, right? It is painting here a very funny image where the mountain is exploding but the nations are flowing upwards. So it's a supernatural, spiritual, metaphorical language that you have the highest mountain because God is there. And number two, one day all the nations will come, whatever color of skin they will come. And why would they come to come? Because you know the **house of Lord of Jacob that he may teach us his way.** One of the most important thing about this spiritual experience is that God will teach us his way, out of God's presence will be the law, the word of God and people will learn to walk in his path. As a result of walking in his path, this will come.

Isaiah 2:4 (ESV)

He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

So we actually have this desire in our hearts to have peace, everybody in this world wants peace. Is it just a naive illusion or aspiration from the human heart or is it a reality? Is that something which United Nations put up it ever since they put it up, there are still wars and it doesn't really work. The concept of

heavenly peace is more than the absence of war. If you look at 'Shalom' in Hebrew history, it means when you have got heavenly peace or Shalom it's you've got no cracks or defects. For example in Deuteronomy you've got an altar the Lord and when you bring the stones to this altar and when you put it there, the stones have no crack. Example, the wall, which Nehemiah built has no gaps, it is whole. Job describes

Job 5:24 (ESV)

You shall know that your tent is at peace, and you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing

Which means you go to the whole flock of sheep and you'll find all your sheep are there and then you've got Shalom. It is wholeness, completeness or fullness. It is not just a negative concept, absence of war. Shalom is not a unidimensional United Nations definition, as long as I'm not fighting to you we have got Shalom. Shalom is a very deep concept that has got physical, relational, and moral dimensions.

Of the physical is physical wellbeing, safe and healthy. David is a young man, went to visit his brothers who were fighting Goliath's army. First thing he asked him, how's your Shalom? That means are you still alive, are you healthy, are you fighting fit? The other aspect of Shalom is prosperity. Yes like the prosperity gospel. God is not against your prosperity. In fact, if you look here, Jeremiah 33:6

Jeremiah 33:6 (ESV)

Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security.

So either Shalom includes prosperity, God doesn't want you to be miserable and poor but it's how you gain that wealth. It includes success, it includes the concept of victory. So when you actually wish someone Shalom, it's like Chinese New Year coming up. When you wish someone Chinese New Year, you're wishing them prosperity, but it's one dimension. The Chinese only have got one dimension, prosperity and that's about it. Shalom is no less than prosperity but a whole lot more and we need to understand what it means. It also has a relational dimension, justice. You must have prosperity, yes but in the context of justice and here how people relate to each other is important. Here you have 1-Kings

1 Kings 5:12 (ESV)

And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him. And there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty.

A treaty is an agreement between two parties where the conditions of that agreement are equitable between the two of them. Same thing with God.

Isaiah 54:10 (ESV)

or the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

So here is an agreement between God and his people, what is equitable? He will be their God and they will be his people. In relational dimension therefore Shalom is close friends.

Jeremiah 20:10

For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side! "Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" say all my close (shalom) friends, watching for my fall.

So it not only rightly related, but they're close friends. That means Shalom gives you an intimacy kind of dimension.

Exodus 22:4-5 (ESV)

If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double. 5 "If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed over, or lets his beast loose and it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best in his own field and in his own vineyard"

You see if your cow escape and go to your neighbor's yard and eat all the daffodils there. You have to go and buy all the daffodils and give back to your neighbor then Shalom is restored. You cannot have Shalom in the presence of injustice. Sony president and CEO Kenichiro Yoshida and bitter rival Microsoft CEO, Satya Nadella, and the news headline says,

Once ferocious rivals Sony and Microsoft are teaming up - and that's bad news for Google

Now it's not just peace you know, when Sony and Microsoft team up they are going to combine and become even better than they are alone, which means they are going to be best buddies. So this idea of Shalom is right relationship is being a blessing to each other. We're not just to be at peace with each other. We're designed to be a blessing to each other. So there's no Shalom without righteousness. That's why Isaiah says,

Isaiah 2:4 (ESV)

He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares...

They won't have peace unless they have justice. By justice it means God's justice as our judgment is always biased. And if you look here is Isaiah 32

Isaiah 32:16-18 (ESV)

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. 17 And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

So there can be no shalom without righteousness, except you have got false Shalom. False Shalom is in Jeremiah 6, it describes false prophets

Jeremiah 6:13-14 (ESV)

For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. 14 They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace.

There is an artificial Shalom. How? For example, two children; A and B. So the A takes all the toys from B, so B is crying and the mother says don't cry, she is your baby sister give her everything. Most of you do that, I have also done that. But A is not happy, because no justice. You cannot have Shalom without justice.

Imagine somebody comes as a bully and grabs you and beat you up and they say, okay-okay I surrender, let's have peace and then you smile and he smiles and is a picture of perfect peace, but he's the bully one and you cannot handle it. Would you be happy? It is a false peace with enforced injustice.

That's what happens in Hong Kong. The young people aren't happy. Why are they unhappy? The older people there say, don't go and cause trouble on the street, they say all our business went down. The older people only think about money, but the younger people are thinking of freedom, democracy, something they want in their lives. The older people, they don't care, as long as there are three square meals a day, they are okay. But the younger people want something more and you can look at the aspirations.

The leaders of the umbrella movement are all Christians. Joshua Wong was a Christian. They don't act on behalf of the church, but they get these ideas of Shalom or freedom of liberation from oppression from the word of God. Reverend Yuen Tin-Yau, former president of Hong Kong Methodist church and chairman of the Hong Kong Christian Council say,

"Society has changed. People are getting richer and they don't just want services. They want to build a fair and righteous society, and this is particularly what the young generation wants,"

He understands they are not out there fighting and throwing petrol bomb for nothing, there is something that is missing, you just can't tell the young people to go home and don't cause trouble, they want something more. Reverend Lo Hing Choi president of the Hong Kong Baptist Convention says,

"Many people said, 'Why don't you condemn the young people also?' My answer is, let's first set up an independent commission to find out the causes of their actions," he says.

*"We have to **understand the reasons**. Just saying they are wrong will not solve the problem. It does not mean we are encouraging them to use violence."*

So the church is in a terrible predicament in Hong Kong. Whether you support the young people or not, either way people will leave the church, but the church has to be involved because this involves Shalom.

There's another dimension besides the physical and the relational dimension. The third dimension of Shalom is moral. When we actually bring Shalom, is bringing, working to remove deceit and hypocrisy and promote honesty and integrity. So, when you bring Shalom, you bring a straightforwardness and honesty into the situation. So we have. Shalom described in Isaiah chapter 2 encapsulates the whole idea of physical wellbeing, whole, relationally whole and morally right, and it runs perfectly well like the Shinkansen in Japan. It is so fast and you always get to your destination on time because they did a study and found that the average time delay per year is less than one minute. And how do they do that, how they could run a system so well and the only time they lost less than 60 seconds in one year is because they have got elaborate rescheduling timetables, driver training, program root control system, hardware

maintenance, their laws that describe every single step of the way, and if you break those laws they will be late, but the Japanese people stick to these laws and Shalom is like that.

Shalom is like a whole bunch of thread all in different colors, but when you actually weave them together, rightly related, rightly connected, each color in its particular place, each thread undergoing a particular route. If you look behind there is the picture of Shalom. If you look at the whole of creation, someone describes it as

God created all things to be in a beautiful, harmonious, interdependent, knitted, webbed relationship to one another. Just as rightly related physical elements form a cosmos or a tapestry, so rightly related human beings form a community. This interwovenness is what the Bible calls shalom, or harmonious peace

You can see this interrelatedness in this world. The whole of world is created in such a way that every species is interdependent and why we're experiencing so much trouble in our world today is because we are disrupting that web which God created.

IDOLATRY DISRUPTS SHALOM

The reason why the whole universe is in turmoil is because of idolatry. Here we look at the people who are full of things, empty of God;

Pagan Religions

Isaiah 2:6 (ESV)

For you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of things from the east and of fortune-tellers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with the children of foreigners.

The people have abandoned their God and they join and worship other gods.

Materialism:

Isaiah 2:7 (ESV) *Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures;*

The time of Isaiah was a time of great wealth and prosperity, full of things but empty of God,

Military might

Isaiah 2:7b *their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots.*

Idolatry

Isaiah 2:8 (ESV) *Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made.*

That is what happened to the people of Judah and it deviates from God's purpose for us because God created man in the image. There is a purpose where God created us to be interdependent, to be related in a matrix of shalom and when we sin

Genesis 2:16-17 (ESV)

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

The eating of the fruit is basically asking for moral autonomy, I will decide what is right and wrong, I am not going to be told what is right and wrong and this is the form of idolatry because the only person who could absolutely know what the consequences of your decision must be God, yet we demand autonomy not understanding its consequences.

Yesterday they started to demolish one of the many nuclear reactors in Berlin, Germany. Why do they do that? Because years ago in the Fukushima earthquake and reactors contaminated much of the ocean and it was a total disaster. Germany has about 7-10 more reactors. They've got to decommission everyone by 2022 and the problem is that it takes 1 million years for the radioactivity to die down. In fact, it's so hot it cannot be transported for several decades. In fact, they can only put on special silos to seal them up for 150 years from today. And do you know all over the world there are 400 nuclear reactors.

When we first started it, did we know all the consequences? You cannot have moral autonomy unless you've got supernatural wisdom and that's a problem of sin. When Eve saw the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, she saw the tree was good. Delight to the eyes, desired to make one wise and she took it. Any consultation? Did she check with Google? She took moral autonomy upon herself, unknown to her all the consequences that would cascade down to us today. That's what sin is.

Idolatry is making something your absolute priority and to deny that impulse is unthinkable. Somebody offered you a job which is double the pay, you do not know what is the job and just took it, that's called idolatry. You need to think about it. Atheist Christopher Hitchens says,

.....there were two things in life you should never pass upto have sex or be on television...

That's having an idol. How many of you participated in the Alibaba single day sale. Did you know that Alibaba one day sale made more money in one day than the three day sale of Black Friday in America. One day sale in Alibaba outstrips American Black Friday weekend. And recently there was a CNN article on studies at the University of Bangor. They actually looked at this phenomenon when you have got sales. They put people into a laboratory and they flash all the brands up; Microsoft, Sony, Mac, and you know people's hand automatically click on the familiar brands. And then not only that when they did this experiment, they put their head in an MRI machine to look at blood flow and you find that the more complex the deal is, the brain activity goes down, that means the more complex the deal is the less you think. So therefore, one day sale makes more money than three days. Three days you can think, one day you cannot think. All you have to do, they've really discovered the power of branding. You just see the brand you like you don't think, you just click and that's why Alibaba does better than Black Friday.

Idolatry is instinctual, it's illogical, it bypasses the brain. If there's something that you automatically do it means you are addicted to it.

Isaiah 2:8 (ESV)

Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made.

So we are actually created in the image of God to aspire to be bigger than ourselves, greater than everything around us but instead our heads are within the four corners of our handpone and that is the limit of the experience of young people nowadays. You might as well be a paraplegic, paraplegic at home like Superman, watch the TV, click, click, click, finished. Young peoples should be out using the hands and legs, they are acting like paraplegics, you see we are limiting ourselves to the things that we create with our hands. In fact, materialism is actually a result of the poverty of our spirit. Here's a psychologist and she writes.

In other words, when we are under too much pressure or denied choices, when we feel we can't do anything right, and when we are lonely and lack meaningful relationships with others, we turn to goals that aren't very good for us as a kind of defensive strategy. 'If I can't get the love I need in my life, then I'll become rich and famous and people will love me for that.'

Materialism is a cry for help.

"our fragile sense of self needs support and this we get by having and possessing things because, to a large degree, we are what we have".

So if you are depressed, what do you do, you go shopping. Jack Ma, China's richest man was happier earning \$12 a month and he writes, **anyone with \$1 million is lucky, but when you reach 10 million, you've got trouble.** That's what Jack ma says. In fact, Rafael Badziag actually approached an investment bank and get names off 21 very rich people and he did research on them and he writes

The difference between "financially successful people (millionaires) and financially super successful people (billionaires) boils down to the fact that the latter get pleasure making money, but don't enjoy spending it

Can you imagine? You are stuck. The only pleasure you get is to make the money, but you don't spend it and you die you cannot take it with you. That's the worst condemnation you can actually have, and that's a result of what they cannot help it. It's idolatry. Professor Mike Norton of Harvard Business School interviewed very rich clients of an investment bank and found two things.

1. rich person getting even richer experiences zero gain in happiness
2. the happiness will come from the money they don't yet have ..they needed 2-3x what they had

So if you're a billionaire you need to get 3 billion before you're happy. Here's the Easterlin paradox. When the GDP of a nation goes up, as you can see the United States discovered by this chap called Easterlin, GDP goes up happiness goes down. You think only the white guys have this problem, try the Japanese, 25 years GDP goes up, life satisfaction stays the same. There's no correlation at all. Well known fact, in fact, how to get happiness, by giving money away. There's a Gallup poll of 136 countries and the green is when

you give money away is correlated with happiness. That means in countries where they get more happiness by giving money away, it is green. You know, it is green all over the world except Rwanda or somewhere else where people were not happy about giving their money away. So there's something in the human heart that when you give something, it actually buys happiness.

IDOLS MAKE US LESS HUMAN.

Psalms 115:7-8 (ESV)

They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. 8 Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

So when we are made to worship God, we become like God. We explore beyond our human existence and our knowledge and we go in an upward trajectory to what he is like. When we confine ourselves to what we create, we become like what we create. We have hands, but do not feel, we become less human.

Here is Captain Planet, Ted Turner, huge billionaire. He's so rich that he buys a ranch, which is half a million acres of land. You probably have to fly the airplane to visit your neighbor. All this wealth isolates him. It brings you further and further away, you buy a bigger bungalow, you go and sit in first class, you see only five people. Wealth brings you away from the things that matter. What else is wealth?

There's a whole bunch of experiments done by the University of Berkeley and California. They found in their research that wealthy people when you look at people's face are less able to read emotions. When you're sad, they cannot tell you they think you're happy. In fact, they send some researchers to a traffic light and then looked at four corner intersection and they notice the people who drive expensive car; Ferrari, Mercedes Benz, four times more likely to cut the queue than people who drive cheaper cars. At the same time they went to pedestrian crossing. When you're at a pedestrian crossing, when some pedestrian comes along you should look at the pedestrian, look at the face, and then you stop. In America you are supposed to look at their face and stop. They find that people in expensive cars were 46.2% more likely to go past the pedestrian crossing without stopping to let people cross, people in cheaper cars tend to stop and wait.

The found that people who are in expensive cars more likely to double park because they think they own the whole road. In fact, New York state psychiatric institution did a study on 43,000 Americans and found that the rich people are more likely to shoplift. In fact, they had another experiment where the people who are asked to come in to do some various work or experiments within the laboratory. As they left the laboratory, there was a candy jar and the candy jar says only for children. The rich people are more likely to take the candy. What's wrong with rich people? They looked at the MRIs scans to look at empathy area, and they found that when exposed a picture of sick children only the rich people nothing shines. For poor people when they see sick children, their empathy area lights up.

Which means wealth makes you less than human. It takes your humanity away. In fact, Stephen Cote from the University of Toronto looks at this phenomenon called wealth differentials, and it's very interesting. Do you know if you see somebody with a smaller wealth differential compared to a larger wealth differential, let's say for example, you live in USJ4 like me and I see some neighbor in USJ4 having

problem, I'm more likely to help him. If I see a neighbor from Sentul, very poor one, I am not likely to help him because of the wealth differential. Wealth differential makes you more likely to help someone who is more like you. And the reason why it is so is because rich people become rich because by saying no.

A lot of people come to rich people ask them for money, so they learn to say no. They learn to insulate themselves from the feeling in their heart of sympathy. So, actually being rich insulates us, and it's a very, very difficult thing. This is the 20th century psychologist, Abraham Maslow who proposed that healthy human beings have a certain number of needs and these needs are arranged in a hierarchy, and basically you've got self-esteem, love, belonging, safety and physiological. These needs are called deficiency needs. I mean, you must have them, even animals have them.

When you adequate to food, adequate to love, adequate to safety, you don't feel anything right. I mean, you don't come to church and say, oh thank God there are no robbers outside the church. It's a deficiency need. When you have these needs met, you don't feel it. What you need to feel is the growth needs. When all of these things are finished by then only you look and basically decide, why I buy here? Is there such a thing as God. See, unless this is taken care of you will never think, why am I here? What is the purpose of life? How to reach the highest potential as a human being? Greed keeps us down here. We never reach self-actualization. We never ask why we are here. That's a problem. Idolatry keeps us down here. I mean, it makes us less than human. We're not like humans. We are like animals.

In fact, not only it makes us less human, the way we treat other people is also less than human. We look at everybody else in a utilitarian manner. Everybody's either white or black. You're either helpful or useful to me, or you're my competitor. So I look at you, you're either for me or against me, and the whole world is like that. So our neighbors become less humans. When we look at our neighbors, we don't see them as a human being that God loves and that you should love and you should honor, respect and bless. We see them as our gang or not our gang, so that makes them a commodity. That's what idolatry does.

The Greeks tell an old story of a myth of a King called Midas. He was approached by a god called Dionysus, god of wine and he asked him, Hey, what would you like for your birthday present and King Midas said, I want to have a special touch, whatever I touch turns to gold. So Dionysus gave him this gift. So he went outside, he touched the tree it became gold, he touched his house it became gold, after a while touching everything, very happy, very rich, he is like billionaire many, many times over, he got hungry, he touched the fried chicken it became gold, he touched his cup of water it became gold and the worst thing was his daughter come and hug him, she became gold. That's a beautiful picture of idolatry. When everything you touch is gold but you lose your soul, you're hungry inside.

In fact, all of us are involved in idolatry. We are what we do. This is a professor of business studies from Harvard, and she talks about people who retire.

"They will usually say, 'I'm a retired librarian' or 'I'm a retired educator' or 'I'm a retired research chemist'. They will still have that profession tacked onto who they are,"

And I look at my own self and one of the reasons I don't retire because I don't want to say I'm a retired doctor because medicine is so much part of my life that you take it away, I am not a person. I remember

this thing that happened to me when I was in and my wife will always remind me of this. When we're young, we went to New Zealand for a holiday. And we had a great time driving around and then one day I stayed in the farm. Funny in New Zealand farm, they make your children work day and night and you have to pay them money. So children went and pitched hay and all that and in the end we pay the farm money. It was so quiet and I was driven out of my mind and I cut short my holiday to fly back home earlier to work and I realized I was an idol worshiper. I worship my work and work defines me and tells me who I am. And so professor Amabile says,

"We need to think about who we will be - who we want to be when our formal career ends"

Life is more than your work. Chloe Kim is an Olympic Medal winner at the Winter Olympics. She's a real phenomenal world champion and she goes to Princeton University and she says,

"I have so much I want to do in my life – I want to be a lawyer, I want to be a scientist, a doctor, all of these crazy things I want to try."

So young people have all this in front of them, right? But she's very smart too. And she says these words,

"I'd love to live just a normal life there, where maybe people don't recognize me and get to know me not because of what I do, but just because of me,"

So deep within even Olympic champions is a realization there is a real me that is valuable beyond what I can do or look like or attain. You look at Prince Charles advised by his father, the Duke of Edinburgh, **who we are is not what we wear or what glitters is the spirit that defines us.** Idolatry makes us less human.

CONSEQUENCES OF IDOLATRY:

Isaiah 2:9 (ESV)

So man is humbled, and each one is brought low– do not forgive them!

So whatever money you have gained and wealth that you're addicted to, you will be brought low. There are personal consequences. King Uzziah became so rich, became so arrogant that he went into a temple just because he was a rich man and powerful King he offered sacrifice instead, you cannot do that only a priest can do that. Immediately he was struck with leprosy till the day he died he was a leper. Psychological studies shows the adverse effects of materialism, they did a study on 18 year olds. They took a materialism questionnaire at 18 and rechecked it when they're 30 years old, and they found that the 18 year old were retested 12 years later and materialistic people are more susceptible to mental disorders. That means the more you have, the more crazy you are.

And you look at the financial crisis in Iceland, during the financial crisis in Iceland, two types of people emerged. One, they lost their money and you know what they became so materialistic they could earn harder to get it back. Another one lost all their money and say money is useless, I might as well focus on

the family. And you found that the wellbeing was better for those who focused on their families than those who continue to want to have more money.

There was a study on children in church, two groups. One of them were taught to be less materialistic. Then they compared with another group who were just left alone. Materialism was associated with low self-esteem. The more materialistic your children are, the lower less self-esteem they have, you know why? Because their self-esteem is dependent on what they have, not dependent on who they are. That's a problem. Another study in the Journal of Consumer Research link loneliness to materialism. That mean the more lonely you are, the more you want material things and a more material things you have, it isolates you socially and so therefore you become more lonely. It's a vicious cycle.

One of the longest studies in the history of mankind are the Grant and Gulick study. They looked at men, poor and rich and followed them for 80 years and they found out the ones who reach 80; the most important thing that you could learn from the study is that embracing community, shalom allows us to live longer and happier. Those who are lonely were died earlier. Lonely people, more prone to heart disease, stroke, depression, dementia. Community is more important than smoking or obesity, diet or exercise. That's how we are created. We can be rich, famous, but many of them wind up killing themselves as a young Korean star, who wrote,

"I felt every thing is empty. I am again walking down a path to reach a destination I don't know"

There will be judgment and this a specific day of judgment for the people of Judah.

Isaiah 2:10-12 (ESV)

Enter into the rock and hide in the dust from before the terror of the Lord, and from the splendor of his majesty. 11 The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. 12 For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low;

So that means the Lord has a day when all the billionaires would be brought down. That's a fact. There is a day. In fact, all that is men will be brought down. Look at this. Verse 13 to 17

*against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and
 against all the oaks of Bashan; 14
 against all the lofty mountains, and
 against all the uplifted hills; 15
 against every high tower, and
 against every fortified wall; 16
 against all the ships of Tarshish, and
 against all the beautiful craft.*

There is going to come a day for every single one of us where there's judgment and every single thing that you've built up will be brought low. As sure as the sun shines tomorrow there will be that day and your idols will not save you,

Isaiah 2:17-21 (ESV)

17 And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away. 19 And people shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. 20 In that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, 21 to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.

It will come a day. I remember years ago in this country we had the banana notes, currency of the day. The Japanese issued banana notes which were very precious during the war. Towards the end of the war, you could have whole barrel full of banana notes, nobody will take it, it was worthless because the Japanese who issued it were defeated. Every generation has a judgement day and there will be one judgment day in the end.

RESTORING SHALOM: STOP AND COME

As Christians what is our challenge? Our challenge is to restore Shalom, and we do two things.

Isaiah 2:5 (ESV)

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Isaiah 2:22 (ESV)

Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?

So we have to repent, what is repentance? Turning from the ways of man and idolatry and turning towards walking in the light of Lord.

A story was told of a man who was granted by angel one wish. You know what was his wish, I want to have a copy of the financial times one year ahead, guess for what, so that he can buy all the stocks one year from now. So he got the financial times, he read it, looked at the stock market, and suddenly he turned the page and found the obituary with his name in it. You think he went out and buy shares anymore after that? No point. Because his life is taken away and that's what judgement is, it is not regarding the man who in his nostrils has breath.

Every single one of you will have an obituary. You know every single one of you years from now, there will be your name there. You can have the financial times, but it won't do you any good. Many of us take this attitude towards God. Like this cartoon Nelson Mandela goes to heaven and God takes a selfie with him. We look at God like a tourist, you know, take selfie with God. Five minutes each morning, as long as I have done my job, I'm off. The challenge to us is not looking at God as a tourist, but looking at God as a worshiper, the only person who can bring Shalom.

Martin Luther King lived in a place in America at a time where the blacks were oppressed and he had this dream.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!

And he ends his speech with these words,

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together." Isaiah 40:3-5

This is taken from Isaiah 40. He recognizes the great injustice all over the land of America but in the end, he actually refers back to scripture because he was a Baptist pastor and he know that justice can only come with the word of God. So therefore Isaiah challenges us,

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

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.

However Martin Luther will dream, he cannot bring Shalom. You can wish for world peace, but you will never have world peace because you need a Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 53:5 (ESV)

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

A price has to be paid for Shalom. B takes A toys and you cannot tell A to shut up and love B, there is a price to be paid, Jesus Christ came to pay that price. The writer of Hebrews tells us, you know this mountain of Zion is already here. You look in Hebrews,

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The New Testament comes and tells us that we have already come to Zion; we have already come to heavenly Jerusalem, all the saints all the righteous spirits and angels are gathered with us today. Can you imagine that spiritually we are already there, that's why Paul said, we are given every spiritual blessing under heaven. Why?

Ephesians 2:14-16 (ESV)

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

Jesus Christ is that perfect human being. We cannot bring Shalom alone. When we take him as our Lord and savior, he becomes our peace. We join the community of Shalom. We join the community of the righteous spirits. And then there's a grand plan. The grand plan is one day when we get our redemption and we are glorified with him. There's a plan which is set forth in Christ as a plan of fullness of time to unite all things in him, all things in heaven and all things on earth in a wonderful web like tapestry of the world. We will all be united one day and the basis of our Shalom is that Jesus Christ paid the price.

Someone got to pay the price. We cannot have an artificial peace where you just, if somebody bangs you up and the bully comes and hits you, and peace is just don't hit me anymore, no, there must be justice and Jesus Christ pays for shalom. It takes an active process in church, Hebrews says,

Hebrews 12:14-15 (ESV)

*Strive for **peace with everyone**, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;*

It is incumbent on us; we are now the assembly of the righteous because of the firstborn of Jesus Christ. It is incumbent on us to strive, pursue with great intensity as if we are fighting a battle to bring Shalom within the body of Christ. In fact, CS Lewis writes

Last week while at prayer, I suddenly discovered or felt as if I did –that I had really forgiven someone I had been trying to forgive for the last 30 years

Shalom comes with forgiveness simply because Christ has forgiven you. Even that is hard to find. If Shalom is like a fabric then this is a picture of our world. We live in a world where the fabric has broken down and we are proud of it. We walk around with the holes on your pants, 30 years ago your parents would be so ashamed and slap your face and ask you to go home. But now a days people walk around with holes in their pants and we are happy and we are proud of it.

The triumph of marketing, but that's what society is like, isn't it? We live in a world where the fabric is broken down, but we are closing our eyes to it. We live in a land where the government has told us we will have equality, we will have righteousness and yet there is racism. A semi-terrorist is welcomed here, and the ashes of a man who has long died is not welcomed here. In fact Mahathir writes,

"It is not like we can do anything, only his cremains have returned. We have allowed Shamsiah Fakeh to returned and no one complained, perhaps because she is a Malay. Rashid Maidin too came back to Malaysia.

Maria Mokhtar writes, a tale of two communist, Chin Peng and Siti Aishah, one is in England, welcomed to come back even though she is a communist and the other one has died and his ashes are not allowed to come back. We live in a society in this country where the fabric has broken down and we have a choice. We are the assembly of Shalom. If we keep our money and time and power to ourselves instead of sending out into our neighbors' lives where ever the fabric has broken down, we are not interwoven socially, relational, financially and emotionally. We have to reweave ourselves, means sacrificially threading, lacing, pressing your time, goods, power, resources in the lives and needs of other people.

Wherever you see the fabric of shalom has broken down in this life, in this community, wherever we are, we as Christians have to weave it in, but you say it's not fair, they treat me so unfair, ashes also cannot come back, but if you look in the life of people who are worse treated by us, the people of Israel. Judah taken as exiles, tormented and humiliated in Babylon. You know what the prophet Jeremiah told them?

Jeremiah 29:5-7 (ESV)

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

The word welfare is actually Hebrew Shalom. And here we have people who hated their tormentors and Jeremiah tells them, you seek the Shalom of the city I sent you in exile. You pray to the Lord on its behalf for in its Shalom you will your Shalom. And that is a message for every Malaysian that sits here today. However, unfairly treated you are or how unfairly you believe your future will be in this country, we are to seek Shalom because in the Shalom of this country you will find your Shalom.

The call to Shalom is a call to suffering. How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things. This land needs this gospel, this land needs us to weave ourselves, to interconnect but instead some of us continue to like the fabric stay away. We see where the fabric is broken down we don't want to get involved. We don't want to reach out our hands because you know why we get hurt, but you cannot get hurt. You know why? Because we have been given every spiritual blessing under heaven. We are now in the assembly of the righteous. We have now come to Mount Zion. That's a spiritual truth. We have all people have our debts paid by our Lord Jesus Christ. So what stops us from sacrificing and reweaving ourselves into the lives and reconstituting the fabric that's broken down in every part of our society. That is our challenge. That is our duty. That is our honor. That is his glory.

Let's pray,

Father Lord, this is Christmas. The advent of heavenly peace, the vision of heavenly peace, which we now experience in part and look forward to experience in full. We pray each of us will be so filled with your Shalom because of what you've done on the cross, and that we will go out and we will seek places in this land, in communities, in families and workplaces where Shalom is broken down, where people don't get on, where people try to sabotage each other, where there's two honesty, there is no integrity, there is just evil, we pray that we will insert ourselves, allow ourselves to be vulnerable and weave ourselves into the lives of those who are so broken because our debts have been paid, our Shalom has been restored, our future with you is assured. We ask you to bind us as a church together and in this church we will experience true shalom and the world will look at us and see our Lord Jesus Christ. The world was see real peace. We ask for Jesus sake.

Amen