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The Story Is Shalom

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Jesus entered Jerusalem to cheers, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven and glory in the highest." In a lot of our Bibles this section of scripture is labeled as the triumphant entry. And yet on this day as Jesus came into the city he didn't do so with victorious ecstasy, but rather he wept. The Creator of the universe, the giver of breath to all things, the son of God looked on Jerusalem and wept. And he cried out would you have known on this day the things that make for peace, the things that make for peace.

Now, if we fast forward 2000 years in our Western context, we tend to take those words and kind of over spiritualize them. We relegate them to a meaning of a very personal peace between us and God that Jesus came to establish peace between us and God, so we wouldn't have to go to hell and we leave it there. But if we understand it in the context, if we keep reading, we find that Jesus begins to talk about the empire that is about to come in a few years and completely demolished the city and further subjugate the people. He's not talking about just an inner peace or a spiritual peace or a personal peace. He's talking about actual real life, tangible peace in their moment in history and their cultural moments. Would you have known the things that make for peace? For Jesus Jerusalem was supposed to be the beacon of hope for the world. Israel were God's special people, the conduit to be his peace to the world and he mourns that they did not know the things made for peace.

The Hebrew word for peace, Shalom shows up 250 times in the Old Testament. The Greek word 'eirene' shows up a hundred times in the New Testament. In fact, it's in every book of the New Testament except for first John. It means wholeness or completeness. It can be found in material prosperity. It can be found in good relationships. It can be found in an eschatological vision of peace among the nations. It's about peace with God, togetherness, wholeness, rightness with God. It's about togetherness and rightness and goodness. Peace with one another and it's also about peace with the world around us, the created order around us. In the book, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* we read this;

"The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrews prophets called Shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts are fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be."

See in the beginning, God created and when he created there was life and order and relationship and rhythm. The love of the man and the woman sprung out of the love of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and their love for one another was supposed to be a picture of the Shalom of God to the world around them, but sin entered the equation and it fractured Shalom. It broke the

order. It fractured the relationship. It disrupted the rhythm. It destroyed the world as it was intended to be. And theologians call this moment the fall. But even in the midst of that breaking of Shalom, God peels back the curtain and gives them a little glimpse of the future that one day he will redeem, that one day he will set things right again. That one day the Shalom of God will once again be reality in the world. That one day he will make it what it was meant to be.

Some of you might remember several months ago I talked about, I was reading the Jesus story book Bible to my four year old daughter. And when we start reading about the fall, I was a little nervous about how she was going to react. Was it going to make her scared of God, angry at God, scared of snakes? What is this going to do? And her question when we got to the end of the reading was, "Mommy, why God not kill the snake?" See, there is a longing within all of our hearts that so rooted for God to show up and set things right, to bring them back to what they were meant to be. And you go nine more chapters in the story and God comes to a man by the name of Abraham and says, I'm going to turn you into a family that is going to turn into a nation. And through you all, the nations of the world will be blessed. God would bring his Shalom through that family. And after 400 years of slavery in Egypt as that family now turn nation begins to experience the joy and the prosperity of the land that God gave them. The question facing them was, how do we live now?

In the books of Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy offered a path to answering those questions. In fact, the Jewish commentary on those books, the Talmud says the entire Torah is for the sake of the ways of Shalom. Israel was created to receive salvation, to receive the peace of God, to experience the peace of God and extend the peace of God to the earth. But then we read in the book of Judges that there came a generation where everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And when everyone either individually or collectively does just what is right in their own eyes Shalom is broken. And then they looked at the people around them and they asked for a King. They believed that Shalom could be reestablished through a centralized government. But the problem was they continued to rebel against their creator and eventually it led to the collapse of the kingdom. They were sent into exile and through the cries of exile, the prophets of Israel rose up and they promised that God's justice and his judgment were directed towards re-establishing Shalom. The prophet Isaiah would point to a moment in time; *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And of his government and peace there will be no end."*

The prophet Jeremiah was a little bit unpopular because he would talk to the people in exile about seeking the peace of the city. Jeremiah told those in exiles, you will not find freedom by seeking peace for yourself, but rather seeking the peace and the blessing of your captors and the cities in which you're held captive. Over and over throughout the entire story of the Old Testament though written by dozens of authors over hundreds of years, these central themes continue to emerge, that something is wrong with the world, that God desires to set things right and his people have a responsibility in making it happen. Ordinary people empowered by God's spirit to do God's work wherever they are.

Then the unexpected happen. God himself shows up wrapped in the skin of his own creation. Zechariah would say that Jesus would be the one to guide us in the way of peace. The shepherds

were told by the angels that peace on earth had come and Jesus came into a time of violence. It's not that the Roman Empire didn't seek peace or give lip service to peace, but they sought to get there through very violent means and Jesus would stand with an alternative message, with another path. Actually about 300 years before the Roman Empire in Greek culture, the Greeks erected a statue of Eirene, the goddess of peace and the Athenian Agora. And there they would celebrate peace found through the decimation of their enemies. And then later in the Roman empire, Pax Romana would seek to establish peace through the empire by just making everyone the same by spreading Greco Roman language and culture and unifying people in that way. And yet Jesus came with a very different message, not of peace that is found in leveling your enemies, but in loving your enemies, not a peace found and making everyone the same, but a peace that is found when you can disagree freely but love regardless.

Eugene Peterson says that Jesus is the dictionary by which we look up the definition of words. I'm still unpacking that that Jesus is the dictionary by which we look up the meaning of words. What if we made Jesus our standard for understanding the things of this world? Jesus actually coined the term 'peacemaker' when he said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the peacemakers." That word did not exist and it wasn't a peace wisher, a peace seeker, a peace keeper, but a peacemaker. And then Jesus would stand over Jerusalem and weep and say, if only you had known the things that make for peace.

If you have your Bibles with you this weekend, turn over to Matthew five we're going to look at a instances in the life of Jesus where he offered a radically different path to enjoying the Shalom of God. This is an exhaustive, maybe they're not even the best examples, they're just my favorite examples. And in Matthew five there are six moments where Jesus says, "You have heard it said, but I say to you." When someone slaps you on the cheek, turn and offer them the other one, when they ask you to go one mile, go two. Hey, it's not enough to just not murder. You've got to not even let an angry thought take root in your heart.

And in Matthew five verse 23 we read this;

²³ *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."*

Now again, if we fast forward 2000 years, put this in our own cultural context. This is how we tend to read this. I'm in church and I'm worshiping and across the aisle I see somebody that I said something mean to yesterday, so I need to walk across the auditorium, apologize, make it right, be reconciled so I can go back to my seat and now my worship counts. That's how we tend to understand this, but if we understand it in the context Jesus was in, it is much more dramatic. This is where a map can be helpful. Okay? Jesus is teaching in Galilee. The place in this culture where you would leave your gift at the altar was in Jerusalem 70 miles away. This isn't a period of history where very few people traveled more than 30 miles outside of their place of birth, where going to Jerusalem on pilgrimage was for many a once in a lifetime experience. And Jesus is saying that if you take that week plus journey to Jerusalem to leave your gift at the altar, and when you're there, you remember that you've got somebody that you're not right with. You leave your gift, you walk 70 miles back home or more if you go around Samaria, which many of them

did, you make it right and then you make that once in a lifetime journey again. Jesus is saying that peace with your neighbor is priority over pious acts of worship. Jesus is saying; go out of your way to make peace with people. See, this was an empire where all roads lead to Rome. The idea that we will establish peace by letting all the roads of the empire come to the epicenter of power. And in contrast to that, Jesus says, "No peace is found when you take the road to your place of vulnerability. Make it right with the person you have wronged or the person that has wronged you. Go out of your way to make it right.

If we go down a few verses we find in Matthew 5:43 this,

⁴³ *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* ⁴⁴ *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."*

That phrase, love your enemies is found only on the lips of Jesus. No other rabbi, philosopher, writer, teacher of his time or before him had ever made the challenge to love your enemies. And it's actually so radical and revolutionary I don't even know how we might be able to unpack it. So maybe it's better illustrated in a story.

Three years ago I had an opportunity to visit place called the Tent of Nations. It was on one of our trips where we were leading some NCC'ers on a study journey through the Holy Land, which by the way, Pastor Dave and I are taking another group to study in the Holy Land in March of 2020. So if you're interested in that, check it out on the website, shoot me an email. Thank you for that commercial. But on the last trip that I took there, I had an opportunity to go to Tent of Nations. David Nassar and his family own a farm six miles Southwest of Bethlehem. His family has owned it since 1916. And the past 20 years have been a little bit rough. They've had people who've harassed them, who have threatened them, who want to push them off of this land to take their land away from them. Sometimes it's verbal harassment, sometimes it's physical force. In 2014, bulldozers actually showed up and ran over their orchard of fruit trees. But the Nassar's have refused to fight back, at least with physical force. But they've also refused to leave. They refuse to be victims. They refuse to be enemies. Instead, they built this Tent of Nations and said, we're going to practice the way of Jesus that leads to peace. They seek to overcome evil with good, hatred with love, darkness with light. And when people come to their land and they've come before with guns, David will shake their hand and introduce himself and invite them to have a cup of tea. They continued to work the land and make it productive. They invite children, Jewish children, Muslim children, Christian children to summer camp. And they have found that when they walk in this kind of love, it confuses people. When they're offering tea to the person who seeks to do them harm it's confusing and disorienting, and they've said that when they treat the other as a human being, it forces the other to also see them as human beings. Their mantra is, 'we refuse to be enemies'.

Last summer we did a series, Won't You Be My Neighbor? And in that series we asked the question, who is your neighbor and how do you love them? In this series, we're kicking it up to an almost impossible notch. Who is your enemy and how do you love them? In Greco Roman culture, the worship of Eirene and the Athenian, Agora celebrated peace that might be found by leveling enemies. And Jesus said, no, peace is not found by leveling your enemies, but in loving your enemies. And as followers of Jesus, we can't take this phrase, love your enemy and just

reduce that as a nice pithy emotional platitude. It's something we're signing up for. It's something we've got to do. It's the dangerous, beautiful, and yet hopeful act of seeing the Shalom of God come to earth because we've dared to love our enemies.

Alright, next we're going to go to two places. One is over in Matthew 20 we're going to look at something Jesus taught and then flip over from there quickly to John 13 to see what he did. In Matthew 20 verse 26 Jesus says this,

²⁵ Jesus called them together (this is his disciples) and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The Roman empire sought to establish peace by leveraging its power over people, and Jesus recommended a different posture. And in John 13 we see that he puts this into practice. Jesus is about to have dinner with his disciples for the last time before going to the cross. And John gives us this peak inside what's going on in Jesus' head? It says,

³ "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him."

So Jesus is having this meal. It's one of his last moments before the cross and it's like all of this kind of just occurs to him. It's like he has this moment of clarity. That he realized, some translations say that Jesus realized that God had given him all the power and he knew where he was coming from. He was confident in his identity and he knew that he was returning to the father. He knew where he was going. He had a certainty about a vision for his future in this moment where he has tremendous clarity about his identity, about his power, his vision, what he is capable of doing. When Jesus realized he was the most powerful person in the room, what did he do? He grabbed a towel, put it around his waist and started to wash feet.

When it occurs to us in those rare moments when it might actually happen, that we're the most powerful person in the room, maybe we're the most powerful person in the room cause we're the parent and it's just the kids, maybe were the most powerful person in the room because in the board room it's our meeting that we're leading. When we find that we are in this place, that we, it occurs to us, we're the most powerful person in this room in our families and our neighborhoods and our schools in our workplaces how do we leverage that power? Because Jesus leveraged that power to serve in an empire that was driven by power and was built on power and lusted after power, Jesus leveraged his power to serve.

Jesus says, walk in my way. Go out of your way to make peace. Love your enemies, to make peace. Leverage your power to serve others to make peace. And his entire mission was to usher in this kingdom of Shalom, to make peace between God and people and people and people and people in creation. And for those of us that are here this weekend that would claim to be, desire

to be followers of Jesus, that doesn't mean that we just take these sayings and we take these stories and these teachings and put them on this level of, well, he was a great teacher and those are good ideas and that's a great thing to aspire to. As a follower of Jesus, it means that we literally actually seek to grow in his character and walk in his ways and be on mission with him to accomplish the bringing of peace on earth.

Now when we talk about mission here at NCC, we're not really talking about trips or projects or things we do. I mean that becomes a part of it, but most importantly, mission is who we are. It's rooted in Acts 1:8, it's rooted in this idea that we are simply ordinary people who are empowered by God's spirit seeking to do what Jesus did together, wherever we are. And as we are on mission with him things change. Now obviously we don't live in the Roman Empire. Our unique moment in history and place and culture and geography is very, very different, but what does it look like for us today as followers of Jesus to bring peace into a world that is often so divisive and polarizing, in to a culture in which we tend to reduce people to labels and categories? How do we bring peace in a world where the echo chamber and the volume of the echo chamber is amped up to the point that we assume everybody that is a good person and an educated person believes the same thing we do and when we hear an idea that is different from ours, we automatically assume that person is not as enlightened or bad.

How do we seek peace in the world that we live in? How do we rise above this dualistic thinking that there's winners and losers and heroes and villains and us and them and we're the victims and they're the perpetrators. I want to draw your attention to pages eight and nine of your Next booklet. In here you'll find four practices of a peacemaker. We actually are adopting these from NCC youth. These are practices that our NCC youth developed and have been practicing for months now. And when we talk about bringing, you know when we talk about this great cosmic eschatological vision of Shalom that just seems like a lot to bite off and when we talk about being peacemakers that may seem like a noble and lofty but impossible goal. So what we want to invite you to do over the next six weeks is just practice these ways of being a peacemaker.

- Ask anything
- Listen well
- Disagree freely
- Love regardless

Ask anything. No question is off the table. You can ask whatever you want. We hope this is a safe place for you to bring your doubts, your questions. No question is too simple. No question is too complex. Nothing's off the table.

But listen well, can we be people in the next six weeks and hopefully beyond that, that lean in just a little bit closer? Not so we can make our own voices heard more consistently, but so we can understand and hear more clearly a different perspective.

Disagree freely. Look, there's a difference between being a peacemaker and a peace faker. Okay. Peace fakers are people that when there is conflict or disagreement, will either walk away from it to avoid it or just pretend like everything's okay. The goal of peace is not that we all agree, it's not that we all have the same opinion. It's not that we all have the same perspective. You will

hear things in this series that you disagree with. That's part of the point of this series to challenge our perspective, to challenge our own echo chambers, to challenge our opinions. And I hope we have lively banter in our small groups. I hope we have lively banter at meals after services discussing the messages. I hope there is lively banter in the lobbies after we are engaging these issues.

But that when we do that we're all so seeking to love regardless, that we experience, that we engage with, that we offer unconditional love, irresistible kindness and radical forgiveness because peace happens when we see differently. But we stand shoulder to shoulder, and face to face and realize that Jesus is what unites us and we seek to be on mission with him.

Next week, super excited, we're going to have Latasha Morrison who is a leading voice in bridge-building on the national scene. She's gonna be talking about what it means to ask anything and listen well and disagree freely and love regardless. And then the week after that, Pastor Joshua was going to talk about what might be the most understood verse in scripture; do not judge. We're you're gonna talk about how we disagree freely on the path to peacemaking. And then Pastor Mark is going to talk about the power of a meal to disarm, to disrupt, to confuse the other, and to invite into relationship. And then the week after that we'll talk about persecution. What we need to know, how we need to act, how we need to be engaged. And then finally we'll enter into the season of advent talking about the coming of the Prince of Peace.

During this series, we want to challenge you to be peacemakers, to practice the way of peace, to offer yourself as just ordinary people, but being open to being empowered by God's spirit to do what Jesus did the way he did it wherever you are in your families, your neighborhoods, your workplace be on mission, every day. What if NCC was known as a people that practiced the way of peace that sought justice, that gave the good news of compassion to the communities we're in? What if we were able to see in our generation, neighborhoods and nations transformed by the gospel of peace?

Walter Brueggemann said this, "Shalom is rooted in a theology of hope and the powerful, buoyant conviction that the world can and will be transformed and renewed. That life can and will be changed and newness can and will come. It's an announcement that God has a vision of how the world shall be and is not yet."

Imagine if we were a people who knew and saw the things that make for peace. Imagine if we were the people that practiced the things that make for peace. We might just be able to see what is not yet become now. May we be on mission every day.

Father, thank you so much that you have invited us to play a role in your story God, thank you for inviting us to play a role in the impossible vision, the impossible dream of your Shalom, your completeness, your togetherness, your wholeness, your goodness, saturating all of creation. God, I pray that you would help us to practice those ways that we would ask any question we wouldn't hold back. That we would listen well, we would lean in. That we would disagree freely, that we would enter into lively discussion, hopefully for learning new perspectives and offering new perspectives. But above all, we would love regardless that we would show the world your love,

your perfect love, your radical love, your irresistible love. May we be people that walk in peace and extend it to the world around us. In Jesus name. Amen.