

**Series: PUSH THE PAUSE BUTTON - December 12, 2010**

## **THE CANDLE...AND THE LANTERN**

Ezekiel 34, Isaiah 9, Luke 2

1. Has anyone here ever seen the movie, **Changing Lanes**? It's basically a story about road rage between two characters—an attorney played by Ben Affleck—and an alcoholic insurance salesman played by Samuel Jackson. After an accident where Samuel Jackson gets stranded, the retaliation between them just keeps escalating. The part that caught my attention was when Samuel Jackson's character comes very close to taking a drink. When his frustrated AA partner heard his story, he confronts him—yells, "You aren't addicted to alcohol! You're addicted to **chaos! Chaos follows you everywhere you go!**"

-That phrase stuck with me. **You're addicted to chaos!** As I thought about our world—and our culture—I thought, "We **crave** peace—but we're **addicted to chaos!** We talk as if the chaos in our lives is inflicted on us by others—or by our circumstances—and, to be honest, sometimes we **do** hit the perfect storm. But I think a **lot** of our chaos is pretty much self-inflicted. So. I'd like to talk to us **chaos addicts** about the **promise of peace.**

2. Now, here's the cool part of following God. God promises people to His people. In fact, right when things were at their worst for Israel—the city of Jerusalem destroyed, the Temple stripped and burned—God promises a **covenant of peace** for His People. God says,

**I myself will tend my sheep and give them a place to lie down in peace!**  
(Ezekiel 34:13b NLT)

And then these words:

**I will make a covenant of peace with my people and drive away the dangerous animals from the land. Then they will be able to camp safely in the wildest places and sleep in the woods without fear. I will bless my people and their homes around my holy hill. And in the proper season I will send the showers they need. There will be showers of blessing. The orchards and fields of my people will yield bumper crops, and everyone will live in safety. When I have broken their chains of slavery and rescued them from those who enslaved them, then they will know that I am the Lord. They will no longer be prey for other nations, and wild animals will no longer devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will frighten them. (Ezekiel 34:25-28 NLT)**

- a. This is an **extraordinary** promise! Over the top, really. If you read this carefully, the promise is that when they return from exile, all the dangerous animals will be driven from the land, their land will produce world class crops, and no foreign nations will oppress them again. And God caps this all off by saying:

**“You are my flock, the sheep of my pasture. You are my people, and I am your God. I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken!” (Ezekiel 34:31 NLT)**

- b. Now, here’s the question: Did that actually happen? Were all the dangerous wild animals removed? Well, no. There are still at least 5 varieties of deadly snakes that inhabit that regions.

-How about good crops? Well, actually, when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish temple in 586 B.C., they burned the fields around the city—and spread salt on them—poisoning them for generations.

-Well, if the wild animals didn’t get removed and the crops weren’t good—did God at **least** break the chains of oppression for the Israelites that returned? If you look at the historical record, the Babylonian rule was broken—but replaced with Medes and Persians. Their rule was in fact broken—but was replaced by the rule of Alexander the Great—and the Grecian Empire. And then the Romans took over—and they were still oppressing Israel when Jesus was born.

3. Now, what’s going on here? Ezekiel is speaking on God’s behalf, and closes with these words:

**“I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken!” (Ezekiel 34:31 NLT)**

Was Ezekiel just mistaken? I don’t think so—not given how Ezekiel’s other prophecies were fulfilled. Is it possible that God couldn’t pull it off—or He just didn’t know what would really happen? I don’t think so—this is God, Creator of all, speaking—making this promise!

-Or—are we still waiting? It **is** It is clear that Ezekiel was referring to a future time in this prophecy as well. In talking about this Covenant of Peace, Ezekiel, speaking on God’s behalf, says this:

**“I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken!” (Ezekiel 34:31 NLT)**

- a. When Ezekiel recorded these words, David had been dead over 400 years. It’s clear that he was referring to the **Promised One**—the Messiah—the son God had promised David would reign forever. The angel Gabriel told Mary, this Son of the Most High to be born to her, Jesus, would be this promised One.

**You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” (Luke 1:31-33 NLT)**

-In Mary’s prophecy to Elizabeth about, it was clear that **she** expected that this Son she would bear was destined to make everyone’s longing for safety, food and freedom a reality—probably in her lifetime?

- b. And that seems to be the promise of God’s Messengers, too. On the night Jesus was born, the angel said to a bunch of shepherds caring for sheep in the same fields where David had watched them:

**“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.” (Luke 2:8-14 TNIV)**

4. The ongoing message from OT prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel—right down to Mary and Zechariah seems to be that God is going to restore **shalom**—the most profound peace anyone can imagine—through Jesus. That His people will live out this covenant of peace. That oppression and injustice and fear will stop--and fairness and compassion and dignity will prevail. In fact, the name **Jesus** means Saviour. Deliverer. Think about what that name would mean to you if, on a daily basis, your culture was crushed, bullied and impoverished by enemy troops that occupied your land?

- a. Something we’re all familiar with in recent history is the Nazi occupation of France during WW2. From May, 1940 on, the French people and all their resources were taken over and exploited by the Nazis. How many of you think the French were okay with that?

-What if someone had come to them and said, “Someone is coming who will **save** you!!” What would they have expected? Well, they would expect the enemy would be driven from their land—and they would once again prosper and **live without fear!**

-So, imagine how people felt when reports began to trickle in that a mass invasion had begun in Normandy; that on June 6, 1944 thousands of paratroopers had been dropped from the sky? How many of you think that when this all started, people thought, “Wow—by next week, we’ll be free!” But they had to **wait**; it took six long **bloody** months before they were free.

- b. The best word that describes God’s people before Jesus’ birth is the word...**wait**. When stories of supernatural events and angels began circulating—the sense was, “Our waiting is over! The Saviour’s here! Now our land will be rid of these enemy troops and we can live in safety...and prosper—there will be peace!”

-But the **reality** of life since Ezekiel—and since Jesus—is that the covenant of peace has not been fulfilled, has it? Wild animals have not been done away with in Israel—or anywhere else. Sharks still kill surfers, lions still stalk villagers, cobras and rattlesnakes still bite unsuspecting people.

-And throughout the years, Israel has done well—but **not** necessarily renowned for her abundance of food and rain. Hunger still stalks a lot of the world population.

-Rome ran Israel for the next 70 years—then crushed Jerusalem in 70 AD. The Jewish people did not become a nation again until 1947—and since then has been **surrounded** by nations that do not wish her well!

5. When Jesus came, lived among us for 30 some years, died and was resurrected from the dead in power and glory, He taught His Followers something very important. It was clear that his birth in Bethlehem the inauguration of an eternal kingdom that would last forever. But it was different than the conquering king they all expected.

-His Kingdom comes to the hearts of people who will be salt and light—change agents moving subversively, offering peace to a world **addicted to chaos**. But the promise was that this kingdom was **way** more powerful than it looked from the outside—because it was—and is—at work from the inside out. And one day Jesus would return and **shalom** would become a reality everywhere. Chaos, need, oppression? Eliminated **forever!**

- a. So, until then—do we just have to suck it up and live with fear, need, and oppression? Right before He died, this Deliverer—Prince of Peace—said to his followers—right before He launched them into chaos:

**“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”**  
(John 14:27 NLT)

- b. Here’s my thought—and it’s **certainly** not original with me. Is there another way to understand this promise of peace? Does **peace**—like God’s Kingdom—work from the **inside**—out? Is what God promised—the covenant of peace the **peace of mind and heart** that Jesus offered his disciples as a **gift the world cannot give?**

-Think about it; how many of you would like all the wild animals of the world to be removed; disappear? To be honest, **I wouldn’t!** I can think of a few poisonous snakes and spiders I could do without—but I **love** wild animals. Think of what God promised; that they would **not have live in fear of an attack when they’re in the wild**. I believe that God was saying to His people—to **us**, “I will give you what you need to feel safe no matter where you are—or what threat you face!”

-Think about what Ezekiel promised concerning world renowned, abundant crops. The soil in western Canada—and the grain we grow—is some of the best in the world. How many of you think that the farmers in Saskatchewan have more peace than we do? I know some of them—and when they have a **great** harvest, they think, “Well, it’s good **this** year—but...!” Maybe what God is saying is, “I will give you the peace of knowing that under the care of a Good Shepherd—you have **everything you need!**”

-And maybe the promise of no more oppression is more about God's people having an inner freedom that **no one** can ever take away from them? I know people who live in Canada—a country blessed with **amazing** freedom—who are **not free!** Do you? Truthfully, what would you rather have—a few years of freedom on the outside—or a **heart** that's free--an **eternity** of freedom and hope on the inside?

- c. When Jesus made this offer of peace to His closest followers, He had been teaching them about the coming of the Holy Spirit—and **His** role as their **Comforter**; their **Advocate**—no matter **what** they faced in the future. -Ultimately, there was this **amazing** realization that through the Spirit, God Himself would take up residence inside them. The most powerful force in the universe would be at work—both **inside** them—and **outside** them! Jesus was the **Prince of Peace**; the Holy Spirit is called both the **Spirit of Christ** and the **Spirit of Peace**. And that, friends, is why this peace can **never** be taken from us—until God's peace, **shalom**—is returned to all creation.

6. Now, let's just review the facts:

\*God has promised a **Covenant of Peace** as something **He** will provide for His people;

\*Those who have received Jesus have received the **Prince of Peace**;

\*The Spirit of God—the **Spirit of Peace** has taken up residence in us—and the fruit of the Spirit, the result of His Presence in us is love, joy and **peace**;

\*God's ultimate plan is to restore **shalom**—the most profound kind of peace to all He has made—and He starts with us—and works **through** us to bring peace to our world. -Here's the question; if this is true—why does peace seem so elusive—even for people who have been following Jesus, the Prince of Peace for **years?** Has anyone here ever known someone who has the most powerful force in the universe, the Spirit of Peace, living at the core of who they are—but they're restless, agitated, afraid—and reproduce chaos wherever they are?

- a. Is it **possible** that, like Samuel Jackson's character in the movie, **Changing Lanes**, we want **peace**, but we're addicted to chaos? Sometimes our addiction to chaos is as simple as the family schedule. We do it to ourselves. In our world, not only are both parents working—they sign their kids up for everything imaginable—leaving them drained, crabby and exhausted the end of the week. Life is a blur. Relational warmth is pretty much limited to the high five in the hallways as we pass each other. Here's the uncomfortable question: Are these activities are **so** enriching and necessary that the chaos and it's effect on the family's physical, emotional and spiritual health is **worth** it?

-See, we talk about this stuff like we have **absolutely no choice** in the matter; like there's a mysterious **someone** out there pulling the strings—and we're these puppets with no will and no choice. I'd say, we **do** have choices—but we're just afraid to buck the peer pressure of our culture. The bottom line question is—does it make sense--is it even **fair** to ask God for health and peace—and schedule ourselves into chaos?

b. How many of you would like to be a peace when it comes to your money? Few things wear you down faster than financial pressure. But again—sometimes we **want** peace, but we're addicted to chaos. Let me tell you something you **may** not know: **Marketing actually works!** That is, it influences people—like you and me—to believe we need things that we don't need.  
-In our world, we are **experts** at **MORE—NEWER--BETTER**. We can drift into that. But we **don't** know how to do **less**. And we have somehow hooked up our dreams for peace—for satisfaction--to **more**. And **newer**. More car. More house. More—and newer technology. And as we punch in the PIN number on our card, we sign up for chaos—and fear.

c. Something else—and this is a **really** hard one to own. Some of us long for relational peace—but are addicted to **relational chaos**. Somehow we've never noticed that pretty much everywhere we go, there's relational unrest. It's never occurred to us that **we** are the common denominator in every situation. Ever known someone who always seems, according to them, to be surrounded by jerks and negative, complaining people—and has a relational world in **constant** chaos?

-It would seem that their philosophy of relating to others is, **If I agreed with you, then we'd BOTH be wrong!** How many of you think it's right to complain to God about the lack of peace—when we're too arrogant to admit that **we're** the ones created the chaos. When we are **peace lovers**—but not **peacemakers**--when our need to be right, our need to be heard, our need to control others, our need to criticize, our right to be angry is creating **chaos!** We **long** for peace, but we're addicted to behaviour that creates chaos—and too proud to repent.

d. Let me mention one more. We **long** for inner peace—but we're **addicted** to unforgiveness. Anyone here ever met someone whose "**Somebody Done Me Wrong**" song has 3947 **verses** to it? They can't remember what happened last week, but they can recite for hours all the bad things other people have done to them—in intricate detail. See, we tend to think that the inner chaos we feel because of people who've hurt us is **their** fault. It's not! **We** have made the choice to not let go of this stuff—and drag it through life! We **refuse** to **let it go!**

-Can you treat your grievances and your grudges like they're the crown jewels—you know, to be protected, treasured, put on display for people to gasp over? Yep! You can convince others that your life and all its woes and heartaches are caused by people who have intentionally hurt, slighted, lied about, or cheated on you. Or...you can **choose** peace. God's awesome gift to a world of people who hurt and wrong each other is...forgiveness.

-Incidentally, the best gift some of you could give yourself this Christmas is the inner peace and freedom that would come from writing out a list of people who've hurt you—then **choosing** to forgive; choosing peace, not chaos. The advice that the Prince of Peace gives is—**drop the charges! Release them from prison—and release yourself from being a prison guard!** In Jesus' Name—LET IT GO!

-Know the song that sometimes gets sung at Christmas; ***Let there be peace on earth...and let it begin with me...?*** It's true. That's where peace starts.

- e. Now, you're intelligent people—and I suspect that I have not revealed any astounding new truth to you. There ***is*** a difference, though, between knowledge and wisdom. Someone summarized it like this; **Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is *not* putting it in a fruit salad!**

-The Bible has a word for **changing lanes**—the theme of the movie I mentioned. It's called **repentance**. It's a combination of realization, remorse—and **change**.

\*It's **repenting** for creating a schedule that produces tiredness, chaos and impatience.

\*It's **repenting** of the need for more, newer, better—and how it kills generosity and creates anxiety.

\*It's **repenting** for blaming the relational chaos on everyone else—instead of your own pride, need to be right, and control your world.

\*And it's **truly** repenting of your grudge-holding, bitter heart—asking God to forgive you for **your** unforgiveness. And it's **changing lanes**. Knowledge is **knowing** it's the right thing to do. Wisdom is actually **doing** it!

7. Peace, friends, is a powerful, **amazing** thing. That's why **everyone** wants it. But it disappears on us, doesn't it. I heard this great illustration from an author and speaker Shane Hipps. He says that you can compare peace to a candle. The flame on this candle is tiny—but **powerful!** I'll prove it. Let's turn out all the lights in here. Look. The flame on this thing is about the size of a dime—and yet everyone here can see it.

-In fact, I did some research, and found out that, under ideal conditions—and candle can be seen for **6 kilometres!** This flame is very powerful—but it is **also** very fragile. Any little kid can blow out a candle. And if you're outside—a single drop of rain or gust of wind can put it out.

-Know what can change that? Putting the candle inside a lantern. I don't know who invented these—but it was brilliant! See, the lantern shields the flame. I can blow as hard as I want—and it won't go out. Let me up the ante a little. This leaf blower reportedly creates a 200 mph wind. Let's see what happens. The flame **stands!** Think about it; the lantern doesn't **change** what happens outside—it just protects that candle from it!

- a. Our experience of peace is just like that flame. If you've ever felt it—even for a moment--it's powerful! It's amazing! Peace is **the** most longed for experience in our world—because it extinguishes the darkness and hopelessness we feel. In fact, you can't feel genuine joy without peace. The **problem** is how fragile it is.

-See, even if you and I correct our addictions to chaos; manage our schedules, live within our means, treat our relationships with care, and choose forgiveness—our peace **still** gets disrupted by little things. We get up in the morning, take our vitamins—do the pro-biotic thing, thank God that we woke up alive. I mean, you're feeling good, life is good, you're at peace—then someone

cuts you off on the 407. Poof! Peace is gone. Wake up, you're feeling good, you have your favourite breakfast, get kissed as you're going out the door—and you get a **hangnail**—and it **throbs**—**Poof!** Peace is gone. When the peace candle is on its own--it doesn't take much to extinguish it, does it?

- b. Our experience of peace is like the **candle**—but the **covenant** of peace God has created **for** us—and given us through the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ—is like the **lantern**. The promise isn't that you will **never** face danger, or need, or oppression—or having to **wait!** The promise is that **whatever** life throws at you—you can have peace! The power of this covenant—promise—vow of peace God has made—and made possible through Jesus can **preserve your peace!**

-Friends, I can tell you that, as a Pastor, I've seen **inside** the lantern and **outside** the lantern lived out again and again and again. In a previous church, I watched a woman named Joyce face cancer—and chemotherapy, and radiation and disability again and again. Unless she was putting on a **really** good act in the 7 years I knew and worked her, she lived with courage and gratitude—and **never** lost her joy.

-I knew another woman who didn't get the big glitzy solo she wanted in church Christmas concert—flipped out, ranted and raved, and shredded relationships. She eventually went off the deep end.

-What I'm saying is—you have a **choice**. Every single day—no matter what happens. Inside...or outside. With peace protection—or without. It's always available. It comes through the power of the Spirit of God--the Spirit of Jesus--the Spirit of Peace in us. And if you've chosen to receive Jesus—and the life He gives—it's there. And the peace is **God's** gift to you. You simply accept it.

-But it's hard to receive—and I'll tell you why. See, we **know** how to give. But we don't know how to receive. Especially if it's something we don't deserve, didn't earn—it's hard—because it's **humbling**. And we North Americans don't do humility very well. It's hard to admit that you **desperately** need something. And the question is, really, will you receive this gift of peace that God offers this Christmas—and forever--with humility and gratitude?

-How? Well, it's right in front of me—and you—all the time. How we experience it and receive it will probably be quite different. But I want to offer you, in closing, a **very** simple—but profound prayer. It's only four letters long—but it symbolizes humility and need. So, if the winds are howling around you—and your peace is flickering, I want to encourage you to turn toward God—and simply pray this one word prayer. **HELP! You promised peace, Jesus—in return for my anxiety. Can I step inside the lantern? Will you please HELP me?**