

I invite you to open your bibles this morning, to today's scripture text, which can be found in the book of 1 John, the 1st Chapter, verse 9. Which can be found on page ___ in your pew bibles. Today begins our Advent series "The Traditions of Christmas." Today's scripture reveals a lesson of Forgiveness, bringing God's Peace into your life.

1 Jn 1:9

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

NIV

Today begins our wonderful journey into the Advent Season. A time of celebration of the saving mission of Christ, his promised coming, and his manifestation as our Savior. This is the season when we prepare ourselves to receive God's gift of Jesus. It is a time of "getting ready" for the celebration of Christmas.

Over the next four weeks we explore the Advent Season through our themes to discover the teachings from our living Lord Jesus Christ as our source of Peace, our source of Love, our source of Joy, and our source of Hope. We will also be looking at several traditions of Christmas and their association to those themes.

A well-known tradition of Christmas is the Candy Cane. The Christmas Candy Cane originated in Germany about 250 years ago. They started as straight white sugar sticks.

A story says that a choirmaster, in 1670, was worried about the children sitting quietly all through the long Christmas nativity service. So, he gave them something to eat to keep them quiet! As he wanted to remind them of Christmas, he made them into a 'J' shape like a shepherd's crook, to remind them of the shepherds that visited the baby Jesus at the first Christmas. However, the earliest records of 'candy canes' comes from over 200 years later, so the story, although rather nice, probably isn't true!

Sometime around 1900 the red stripes were added and they were flavored with peppermint or wintergreen.

Sometimes other Christian meanings are given to the parts of the canes. The 'J' can also mean Jesus. The white of the cane can represent the purity of Jesus Christ and the red stripes are for the blood he shed when he died on the cross. The peppermint flavor can represent the hyssop plant that was used for purifying in the Bible.

“J” for Jesus, Shepherds staff, white symbolizing purity, red symbolizing the blood of Christ on the cross, and peppermint flavor representing purification. Who would have thought that there was so much hidden in a simple piece of candy? Today as we consider these various representations of the Christmas candy cane, the symbolic reminder of Jesus Christ and his mission to seek, and to save that which is lost, us. The peace that we have, knowing our sins have been forgiven through the righteousness of Jesus will be our focus today.

The atoning blood of Christ on the cross has been shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Through our confession, and genuine repentance of our sins as we approach the cross, we are cleansed white as snow, we are forgiven our sins, purified through Christ's amazing sacrifice on the cross. Through His suffering, the shedding of his blood, His death, and resurrection, as the Lamb of God, sent here to be God's sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. There is such an incredible sense of peace that comes to us, knowing that our Savior Jesus will be our advocate, in order that our sins will be forgiven.

You may not fancy yourself as a Scripture scholar, but you probably know the Old Testament word for "peace": the beautiful Hebrew word, "shalom". In the Bible the word means so much in terms of *human fulfillment*, that there is nothing better you could wish for yourself, or another person. The New Testament word for

peace? If you know anyone named "Irene," then you know the Greek word for "peace". It is spelled the same as Irene in English, although it is pronounced differently. Never the less, it carries into the New Testament all the fullness of the Old Testament meaning, and more.

The word peace in the Bible -- Shalom/Irene -- whether the Hebrew or the Greek, carries not only our English connotation (the absence of warfare, the absence of discord and confusion), but also a very positive meaning. Usually when we speak of peace on earth we have in mind what a certain widow had in mind when she placed the following inscription on her late husband's tombstone: May he rest in peace. Until we meet again.

Individually, these are good statements, but together they don't come out quite right. But wars come and go with such regularity that the two statements coming together may be an honest representation of what the word "peace" has come to mean. (The war is over. Until we meet again.) In any case, it means so much more in the Bible. In the Biblical sense, peace means wholeness or fullness or completeness or rightness -- not just the absence of discord but the presence of harmony.

Jesus Christ is our Prince of Peace, the Lamb of God sent by our Father in Heaven to deliver us from our slavery in sin, into a new existence as the children of God living in his kingdom. We are lost without Christ in our lives. Lost in this world of darkness, lost in sin, lost in suffering, lost in pain, lost in every sense of the word, lost without ever knowing the true peace that Christ offers. Lost, knowing that our eternity after this life will lack the comfort of God unless we experience the genuine

life change Jesus teaches us about in the Gospel, redefining our existence as Christians.

We must have forgiveness of our sins that only Jesus can bring us. How do we achieve this peace, how do we achieve this assurance of our forgiveness? Through confession of our sins.

This brings us to today's scripture, 1 Jn 1:9

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

In this scripture we discover a great promise that has been given to the Lord's people. The pathway to his peace. IF, we confess our sins. To whom is the confession to be made? The confession is to be made to the one we have sinned against, and that is the Lord. Our sins are against him and His holiness. The promise that John gives is that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins.

Notice the language, "he is faithful, and he is just" when he forgives us of our sins. The word faithful literally means "can be counted on, can be depended upon." What John is telling us is that if we confess our sins we can depend upon the Lord, we can count on the Lord, forgiving us of our sins. We don't have to question if our sins have been forgiven, we can count on it. This is an assurance to us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive us of our sins. One of the great encouragements to the Lord's people to come to the Lord for our forgiveness when they have sinned against him, is the fact that they can depend upon the Lord for forgiving them. That dependability is sure, it is certain. If we confess our sins he is faithful to forgive us our sins.

Jesus also says he is just, to forgive us our sins. That is, it is the right thing for Him to do. He is just, for forgiving us, he does not compromise his holiness, or his law, in order to forgive us. He doesn't sweep our sin under the rug, he does not pretend that it never happened. He is just in forgiving us, he is righteous, and holy for forgiving us. There has to be a reason. The Lord can't simply say "I'm going to forget about my law you have violated, I'm going to forget about my holiness that you have insulted, I'm going to forgive you because it would be the nice thing to do." There is a reason that God can forgive us and still be holy, and still be just.

Justice must be satisfied. How then can God forgive us and still be a just God. The answer is found in chapter 2 verse 1. 1 Jn 2:1-2

2 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Our goal in life should be to never sin. We should strive every day to live sinless. We recognize of course that on this side of the grave, this side of Heaven, we will never be able to live a sinless life. There will never come a moment when we can say that we are above sin. In fact, the very thought that we are above sin, that we have been able to conquer it on our own, would be sin itself. Our sinless life is found in Jesus Christ. Each day that we live, our striving to live a holy life, should be predicated upon our appreciation and love to Him. That's what we should do.

Its so easy for us to find defenses to hide behind. We may blame our sin on our heredity, on our environment, on our temperament, on our physical condition. We may claim that someone misled us and that we were led astray. It is characteristic of us all that we will seek to deny the responsibility for sin. It is John's insistence that, when someone has sinned, excuses and self-justification are irrelevant. The only thing which will meet the situation is humble and penitent confession to God, and if need be, to men.

We all know that because of the weakness of our flesh, that even though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak and we are going to sin. We can't live above sin. We should strive each day for that goal of living a sinless life. We should also accept the fact that we are not going to do that perfectly until we get to heaven and we are glorified there. The reality of this present world is that we are going to sin.

Paul puts that into perspective for us in Romans chapter 7 when he says,

Ro 7:18-20

18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

The apostle Paul recognized the fact that he was weak in the flesh, and the good he was determined to do he was not always successful in accomplishing because of the weakness of his flesh. But that did not keep him from striving for the goal. Notice that John says, 2 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.

That should be our purpose, to not offend God, or transgress against his word. But then John recognizes the reality of the fact that we are going to falter because of the weakness of the flesh. So he says, **But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.**

Here is the answer to the question, how can God be depended upon to forgive me, how can God be just in forgiving me. He is dependable in his forgiveness, he can be counted upon for his forgiveness, because he is going to forgive, for Christ's sake. He's not going to forgive because we deserve it, He's not going to forgive because we earned it by our works. We cannot purchase absolution from God by our effort or by anything we possess, it was purchased by Jesus Christ at Calvary.

If we go back to the book of Ephesians chapter 1, the apostle declares this wonderful truth, when he speaks of God's dealings with His people from eternity past to eternity future. He begins by referring to eternity past in saying, Eph 1:4-7

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

How rich is God's grace to forgive us, and how God richly gives us that grace, for the sake of Jesus Christ, who paid for our sins at Calvary. So, when God is called upon to forgive us, when a person confesses their sin, and asks God to forgive them,

he can be counted upon to forgive us for Christ's sake. He is faithful, he can be counted upon to forgive.

We might well have thought that God in his righteousness would have been much more likely to condemn than to forgive. But the point is that God, because he is righteous, never breaks his word; and scripture is full of the promise of mercy to the person who comes to him with a penitent heart. God has promised that he will never despise the contrite heart and he will not break his word. If we humbly and sorrowfully confess our sins, he will forgive.

We don't have to question if God will forgive us. Sometimes the child of God can become so discouraged and so distressed by their shortcomings and their sin, that they question "why should I even go to the Lord this time and ask him to forgive me? I have asked him so many times before, surely he won't forgive me this time. But here's the words of John to encourage us to return to the throne of grace. He is faithful to forgive, and he is just.

He is not laying aside his holiness to forgive us, he is not laying aside the just demands of the law to forgive us. Those demands that the law has had upon us have been satisfied by Jesus Christ. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He lived the righteous life that we fail to live each day. He fulfilled the righteousness of the law. So Paul could tell us in 1 Co 1:30-31

30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

He is our sanctification, he is our righteousness. So when the Lord forgives us, he is just in forgiving us. He is righteous in forgiving us. Because again, he is forgiving us upon the merit of Jesus Christ and his shed blood.

We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. The blood of Christ satisfied the justice of God. The blood of Christ satisfied the offense of our sins. The blood of Christ washes our sins away. SO that he says that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. The essence of the Christian life is to first realize our sin; and then to go to God for that forgiveness which can wipe out the past and for that cleansing which can make the future new.

This forgiveness, through the righteousness of our savior Jesus Christ, our Prince of peace, our lord of lords and king of kings, will bring about the peace that surpasses all peace, bringing harmony into our lives, bringing to us the shalom of God.

Heavenly Father,

We lift up our hearts in great adoration for your gift of Jesus,

The worlds Prince of Peace.

Thank you for sending Jesus into the world to be our Savior,

For sending him to be your sacrifice and atonement for our sin.

We realize that we are lost without his righteousness.

Give us the strength to let go of our excuses,

and self-justification for living in sin,

give us a humble and penitent heart, so that we may

stop evading the responsibility to confess our sins to you Lord.

Thank you for being a righteous and a just God, keeping your word,

For forgiving us of our transgressions against you, and your laws.

We pray for the peace of our Prince of Peace Jesus to come into our lives

and in the lives of all who ask for your Forgiveness.

Amen