

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. From wherever you are joining us from, let's welcome each other together today. It is good to be the church. It's good to be together today. I hope you and your family had an amazing Thanksgiving full of all the food and the fun and festivities. But more than all that, I hope you had a chance to just be thankful. Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His love endures forever. God is so good to us. We have so much to be thankful for. His love for us endures forever. And so, Thanksgiving is always a great reminder that in the Kingdom, gratitude is not just a holiday, it's a way of life. It's not one day, it's every day that we have a chance to give thanks.

And here we are. It is December. We are at the beginning of December. Wow, wow, wow, wow. Where did that year go? That is crazy. Man, I would encourage you to take some time this December, this final month of the year, to reflect on what God has done, what He's been doing, how He's moving in your family. It's crazy that we're here to this point of the year. I also want to let you know that you can officially now put up your Christmas lights if you did not do that. For those of you that did that before Thanksgiving, I just have one question for you. Why? Why would you do that? It says in the Book of Second Hesitations, thou shall not put up thine Christmas lights before thine Thanksgiving. If you say thine, it makes it sound more official. So, listen, Thanksgiving was late this year. If you put up the lights early, it's all good. There's grace for that. There's grace for that. But for this December, here's what I really want to say to you. In the midst of all of the hustle and the bustle and the busy and the crazy and all that we got going on, don't miss a chance to just settle and take time and remember Jesus.

Like, Jesus. They say that Jesus is the reason for the season. Kind of. It's that Jesus is the reason for every season. It's not that He's part of our life. He is life itself. He's not just the reason we celebrate. Jesus is the reason we can celebrate. He's the reason we even get a chance to celebrate or experience any of it. It's not just lights and trees and presents. It's the light who was hung on a tree so that we could always experience His presence. It's the light of the world, the tree of life, that we celebrate Jesus, and His presence is always with us. There's so much to celebrate this Christmas and that's why we're excited to start a brand new series from the weeks leading up to Christmas. We're going to talk about the name behind Christmas. See, I think we know a lot of the things about Christmas.

We know the traditions behind Christmas. We know the festivities behind Christmas. Some of us are well aware of the movies behind Christmas. But do you know the name behind Christmas? So, for example, do you even know what the word Christmas actually means? So, Christmas. Well, let's see. Somebody's listening to that and they're thinking, "Well, let's see, -mas in Spanish, so maybe more Christ." That is incorrect. That is not right. Christ is from Christos in the Greek. That's a word that's derived from Messiah in the Hebrew and -mas from the Latin, missa, meaning to celebrate. So, Christmas is literally when we celebrate Jesus. When we celebrate Jesus. You see, in the Kingdom, names are not arbitrary. They have deep meaning. Because along with any name comes all of the realities and the emotions and the

attributes of that name. Like if I said to you Mickey Mouse or Patrick Mahomes, as soon as I say that out loud, you have very specific thoughts, right?

The realities, the emotions, the attributes of those names come flooding your mind. If I say Taylor Swift or I say Michael Jordan, as soon as I say those names, the names come and they flood your mind. The realities, the emotions, the attributes of the person come along with the name. You see, there's power in names. And that's why God almost always changes somebody's name when they come into the Kingdom. So, like Jacob, the deceiver, becomes Israel, the one who wrestles with God. Silas, a broke-down, busted fisherman, becomes Peter, the rock in which much of the church is built upon. Saul, the killer of Christians, becomes Paul, the writer of the New Testament. There's power in a name. Names really, really matter. Now, think for a second. All the famous names or the infamous names or celebrities that we're familiar with, they only have a name, one, but not God. He's way too big for that. And in the Scriptures, we learn about all the different names that reflect the facets of who God is.

He needs more than one name because He's so much bigger, so much further beyond, so much bigger than we can possibly imagine. He needs more than just one name. And so, that's why in Scriptures you hear things like Jesus is the Son of God, Son of Man, Lamb of God, Holy One, Alpha and Omega, Bread of Life. One verse even calls Him the Desire of all nations who has come. Jesus, the name above every name. He's so much bigger and so much further beyond, and yet He's so accessible. And Christmas is when God came down and we got access to Him for the first time. So, we're going to choose during this Christmas season, leading up to Christmas, to really lift up the name of Jesus. And every time we do, it's going to lift our heads. Every time we say His name, our heads will be lifted. Every time that we speak out the name of Jesus, it's going to renew our minds. Every time we call upon the name of the Lord, it's going to settle our hearts.

And I'm so excited to lift up the name of Jesus this Christmas because salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. There is no other name. Jesus is the name above every name. That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and everyone would acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord. There's no other name by which we must be saved. He is the name above every name, and He is a gift. His name is given to mankind. Did you ever think about this? The name of Jesus and all of the names of God in Scripture, they are gifts. They're gifts. They're gifts that are given to us to remind us of who God is and allow us to experience the realities, the emotions, and the attributes of God. So, I've been thinking about this a lot. Have I been taking the gift of the name of Jesus for granted?

The name of Jesus is not a cuss word. It's a gift. The name of Jesus is not supposed to only be used when I want something or need something. It's a gift. It's not to be spoken flippantly. It's a gift. The name of Jesus isn't only supposed to be called upon when we just desire something and we want it to take place in our life. It's a gift, and it has a power and a presence to it. In

fact, the name of Jesus is so powerful that if you speak it into an atmosphere, things begin to change. Like, watch this. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Right now, there's hope rising in somebody's heart. Jesus. Right now, somebody who's carrying a lot of brokenness is beginning to be healed by His name. Jesus. Right now, somebody who feels joyless is being filled with the joy of the Lord.

Jesus is your strength. Jesus. Right now, as you say the name, love is pouring into the atmosphere and the space. You feel the love of God flowing. Jesus. Right now, as I speak that out, somebody who probably has sickness in their body, you're being healed by the name of Jesus. Jesus. You speak the name, and there's power in that name. It is the name above every name. He is the name that's worthy of our praise. So, during these weeks leading up to Christmas, we're going to talk about the different names of Jesus from the Scripture, many of them that are commonly associated with Christmas. And we're going to let Jesus lift our heads and renew our minds and settle our hearts. And so, right now, right off the bat, I just say, Jesus, we invite you into this time. And we're thankful for your name. And we're thankful for who you are and all the realities that come along with you and your kingdom. Would you come and would you speak to us about your name? The name of Jesus.

You see, the story of Christmas is the story of God putting a face to His name. You ever said that before? "I just can't put a face to their name. I can't remember." Christmas is when God finally put a face to His name. Before then, God was a name, but we didn't know what His face looked like. So, all through human history and all the Old Testament, God was a name without a face. Why was that? Well, because if you would look upon the face of God, you would disintegrate. So, it made it difficult to have access to see God. Anybody that would see Him would literally cease to exist. Not because God was so mean, but because He was so holy. And so, there were only a few people that got lucky enough to be able to see Him face to face, like Moses in the Old Testament. He got to see God face to face. Enoch walked with God. He probably got to see Him face to face. The high priest once a year. Isaiah in Isaiah Chapter 6.

He's like, "I'm looking at God, but woe is me. I feel like I'm melting because I'm a man of unclean lips and I come from a people that are unclean." But in God's grace, He let him see Him face to face. And so, for years and years and years, we did not know what the face of God looked like. He was only a name without a face. Christmas is when God became a face that gets put with a name. Two thousand years ago, when a baby was born in a manger, we finally got to see what Jesus looked like. We finally got to see what God was like in the face of a baby in a manger. All of the beauty, all the love, all the majesty. We finally got to put a face to a name. Before that, there was just a lot of prophecies about God, like this. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

So good. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Here's a question for you. Which of those names do you need Jesus to be for you right now? Do you

need Him to be a Wonderful Counselor to help you make your decisions and lead you into this next season? Or maybe like Mighty God, mightier than whatever you're facing, whatever's going on in your life right now? Everlasting Father, that He's always with you, He always will be with you, and yet He's a Father who draws you close and carries you in His arms and He's with you? Or how about this one? Prince of Peace. And this is the one I really want to focus on today. Do you need Jesus to be your Prince of Peace in this season? You see, peace is an interesting word, isn't it? Because it's really subjective. What's peaceful for somebody may not be peaceful for someone else. So, like my wife and I, when we go on vacation, you give her that beach chair and that book and the ocean waves, that's the place of peace.

For me, I start to get all angsty and I'm like, "Okay, I got to go play some sand volleyball or something." It's just not the same for each of us. And at Christmas time, we'll often say things like, peace on earth or give peace a chance. And those aren't bad phrases. The only problem is that a lot of times when we think of peace, we're thinking about it like the absence of conflict, the absence of chaos, when nothing bad is going on. But in reality, peace is not the absence of conflict. It's the presence of someone. It's not when everything is going perfect in my life. It's when Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is filling me with His peace and He's surrounding me. He's with me. He's all around me. I'm not alone. And when the Prince of Peace is in a space, all of His realities and the emotions that go with it and the attributes of who He is come to my life and I experience peace. It's not the absence of conflict, it's the presence of Jesus. One time, Jesus is talking to His disciples and He tells them, "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace be in this house.'"

And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest upon it. Fascinating. What Jesus is telling to His disciples is, it's the person that brings the peace. It's not the situation. So, when Jesus enters a house, peace will rest upon that house because a person of peace is there. Now, this works both ways. One thing I want to encourage you on during this Christmas season is, when you go to the places, when you go to the family reunion, when you go to the house, when you go to Target, when you go to the busy airport, can you just – I just encourage you, be the person of peace. Like, don't match the chaos of the world. Be the person of peace because when a person of peace is there, then peace will rest upon it. And here's how it works. Jesus, the person of peace, comes into this house and then when I go somewhere, I go to that house and I bring that peace. Does that make sense? That's what I want to encourage you. Be that person this Christmas season.

We've been learning what it is to really practice being a person who looks like and acts like and lives like Jesus. All year long, we learn what it looks like to practice our faith, right? So, whatever you've learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice and the God of peace will be with you. Okay. So, putting it into practice, what does that mean? That's like Scripture. It's meditation. It's silence. It's solitude. It's simplicity. It's all the things we learned about all year long. Catch what this is saying. When we practice, then we experience more peace. When we do the things that Jesus did, we will experience more of the peace of

Jesus. That Jesus wants to give us – He wants to give us His peace coming from these practices. The things we've been learning, like being in Scripture and trusting the word of God, like meditating on His goodness, all the things we learned all year long. And it's really interesting because the disciples who had been with Jesus for three years, at the time that Jesus was crucified, it's like they lost all their peace.

It's like their peace just fell apart. And I think part of what happened to them is they stopped practicing the way of Jesus, so they lost the peace of Jesus. If practices are means of grace, then peace is what we experience when we practice because peace is like the result. There's pathways of peace that we experience because we're practicing the way of Jesus. The disciples, when Jesus went to the cross, instead of doing community, they isolated and ran away. Instead of believing the word of God, they didn't trust Him anymore. Instead of having this sense of courage, they were filled with fear. Basically, because they stopped practicing, they lost their peace. So, I want you to think about this for a second. That's why it's so important to continue to live in the realities that we've been learning this year. To literally practice the way of Jesus. Lose our practice, lose our peace. Keep our practice, keep our peace as the God of peace is with us.

The disciples, on the night that they were waiting for Jesus, it says, on the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, man, they were worried about all kinds of things. The Jewish leaders, the Roman officials. Maybe you find yourself in this season fearful of many things. Here's what Jesus does. He came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Here's what I want you to catch here. This isn't so much of a declaration as it was an observation. When Jesus says, "Peace be with you," He wasn't just declaring it, He wanted them to observe it. Literally, Jesus had come and stood among them, so peace was with them. Get it? So, like peace be with you, an observation that Jesus is in the space. When the angels come to the shepherds that were keeping watch of their flocks by night, and is like, "Peace on earth on whom His favor rests."

That's not so much of a declaration, it's an observation that Jesus has come to earth. So, one of the ways we can experience this peace, peace be with you no matter what we're facing this Christmas season, is that we can just observe that Jesus is with us. The Prince of Peace is in the space. Peace is with us. Peace on earth in whom His favor rests. Not just a declaration, an observation of who Jesus is and what He brings to any situation. What I love about this verse is just this reminder that peace is found in a person, not just in situations or circumstances. So, I can always access the person of Jesus no matter what the situations or circumstances in my life are like. You can always access the person of peace, the Prince of Peace, no matter what the situations or circumstances look like in your life. Because Jesus will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast because they trust in you.

In perfect peace is a little bit like the verse "if anyone is in Christ, they're a new creation." It's an identity statement. When you're in Jesus, you will be in the Prince of Peace and He'll keep

you in perfect peace because they trust in you. So, here's a question for you. Do you often find yourself trusting more in the circumstances or in the one that controls them? Like, if you're just honest about your life, do you trust more in if circumstances are going really, really well or do you have this like, this deep sense, "Okay, Jesus you control my circumstances. You control my physical health, my future, my finances, so you will keep me in your perfect peace." Because we want to answer that question as like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, no, I trust in God, I trust in God, I trust in God." But it quickly shows itself to be true if your mind is steadfast or if your mind is chaotic.

So, if you find yourself, if your thoughts are racing, if your mind is out of sorts, if it feels like it's chaos, it's possible that you're trusting more in the circumstances than Jesus, the one that controls them. You're trusting on whether it feels peaceful more than if Jesus is the Prince of Peace bringing you His peace. In fact, I want to encourage you, feelings of peace, it's far, far less about how you feel and it's much, much more on whether you recognize, Jesus is my Prince of Peace. Like, peace isn't a feeling, peace is a person. That's the biggest thing I want you to take away from it. It's not that I feel so peaceful. And I get it, that's way easier said than done. Like, I can think of lots of seasons of my life in which I just did not feel at peace. I did not have the Prince of Peace, the name behind Christmas, guiding my thoughts and my mind. And one specific situation I can think of that a lot of you are not familiar with is that we had a chance to adopt our daughter Naomi from Ethiopia about 12 years ago.

And she's a thriving teenager. She loves it here at Valley Creek. She's part of Valley Creek Students. She's amazing. But we had to go on a really, really extensive trip to Ethiopia. There was a lot of planning, it was a lot of paperwork, it was just all the stuff. And while we were there, my wife and I both had a really good, let's call it first week and a half there together, but then eventually she had to come back because of scheduling and to be with our older daughter. And so, I got to be dad with a brand new baby. So, just imagine baby Bjorn and me with the baby on the front of me just kind of trying to figure it out for about the next week until we get to bring her back home. And while I was there, a couple of things happened. One is I kept noticing that people were laughing at me when they would see me. And that's always unnerving when that happens. I didn't know why that was. Eventually, I asked someone and he's like, "Oh, no, no dads take care of the babies in this country."

I was like, "Okay, well, I don't know what to do now. That's great. Just keep laughing. It's great." So, that was a little weird. We just had to kind of roll with it. But here's the crazy thing that happened. About, I don't know, two days after Kerry had to come back home to be with our older daughter, I developed a nosebleed that was unlike anything I could possibly imagine. It wasn't like a nosebleed like I need to pinch my nose. It was a nosebleed like I had a break in my sinuses. And it was really bad. I found out when I came home that I could have died from it. But I'm here. Worked out okay. It's fine. But while I was there, that nosebleed was so bad that I had to rely on another family basically to help take care of Naomi. And then, I had to lay in bed and just kind of lower my blood pressure and just hope the bleeding would stop, because we

didn't know what else to do with it. And as I laid there, it's amazing how your prayers in that situation, there's like no eloquence.

You're not trying to be like the greatest prayer in the world. It is like short and sweet. And I just kept praying over and over and over. "Prince of Peace, I need your peace. Prince of Peace, I need your peace. Jesus, I need your peace. Jesus, I need you. I'm in a real bad situation, Jesus. I need your peace." And that is some of the sweetest moments of my life, of genuinely feeling and experiencing the Prince of Peace. Not a feeling, a person coming right down into my situation and joining me there. Eventually, obviously we came home. It worked itself out so well, but it just reminded me that there is a peace that passes understanding. And it only comes from one place and from one person. The Prince of Peace, the name behind Christmas. So, let me just ask you this question. When was the last time you felt peace?

When was the last time you genuinely felt settled in your spirit? The Bible describes peace as a word we're not familiar with. It's the word shalom. And shalom is a word that represents wholeness, well-being, comprehensive flourishing, heart, soul, mind, and strength. It's not like I feel peace. It's like I have deep peace inside my soul. Shalom. Comprehensive flourishing, completeness, wholeness. When was the last time you felt like that? Because Jesus is described as a King of Shalom in the Old Testament, a Prince of Peace. There's actually a story in Genesis in which a pre-incarnate, which just means pre-Christmas Jesus, shows himself and they described Him as the King of Peace, the King of Shalom. And He offers us that peace.

Jesus says, "If anyone loves me and keeps my word, I will make my home in them." That is, a person of peace will come and will reside in here and my peace will rest upon them. Shalom. Not just a feeling. Comprehensive flourishing brought to us by the Prince of Peace. A person of peace that resides in here. This December, maybe you're feeling a little frazzled and the schedules and the parties and the calendar is busy, busy, busy, busy, busy, busy. If that's you, if you feel that way, I just speak to you and I say, Shalom. I say to you, may the Prince of Peace fill you with His peace. May He be the one that comes and shows you more of himself. In fact, I just want to take some time and declare this verse over many of us. Now may the Lord of Peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. Would you do me a favor, wherever you're sitting at right now, would you just even just open your hands like this?

Because I want to declare this verse out because I think it's so beautiful and so profound. And I just say to the single moms in our church, may the Lord of Peace himself give you His peace at all times and in every way. May you feel a peace that truly comes from the Prince of Peace. I say to the worn out, overworked dads that you do not know what the end of the semester is going to look like or how things are going to play out into the first quarter of next year. I say to you, may the Lord of Peace himself give you His peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you. To our students in our church, I speak to you and I just say, man, if you feel alone sometimes, like you're the only one, you don't know what next semester is going to hold,

you're not sure about what's to come or maybe college on the horizon, I speak to you, may the Lord himself give you His peace at all times and in every way

May the Lord be with you. To those that are broken and hurting this holiday season, maybe this is your first time without a loved one around and it's just a whole different situation, and you've got some cracks in your soul. I speak to you and say, may the Lord himself give you His peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you. For those that feel lonely, lost, hurting, broken, or you just need Jesus, I speak to you and say, receive Jesus and then may the Lord himself give you His peace at all times and in every way. May the Lord be with you. To those that have physical ailments in their body and you're facing maybe some scary prognosis, maybe you've got some kind of terminal diagnosis, the first thing I say is be healed in the name of Jesus.

And then, I say to you, may the Lord himself give you His peace at all times and in every way. May you have a feeling that the Lord is with you. To all the Valley Creek Church, to all of us, I say, may the Lord himself give you himself, the Prince of Peace, so that in all times and in every way, you may have His peace. The Lord be with us all. You see, that is what happens when the name that's above every name, the name behind Christmas, comes and moves into an atmosphere, heart, soul, mind and strength. It lifts our heads, it begins to settle our hearts and it renews our minds. What's His name? For to us a child is born, a son is given. The government will be on His shoulders, and He will be called a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. One more for you. Of the greatness of His government and His peace, there will be no end.

Of the greatness of His government and His peace, there will be no end. Okay, check it out. Government, the rule of Jesus. Peace, the result of the rule of Jesus. Where His government rules and reigns, peace is the result. Wherever Jesus and His government, His realities, His Lordship in my life is leading my life, I'm going to experience a peace that passes understanding. Isn't that beautiful? What a promise. The greatness of His government and His peace, there will be no end. I pray for each one of us that we can take hold of that peace for ourselves. We can grab hold of the goodness of Jesus this Christmas season and recognize, man, when the Wonderful Counselor is around, when the Mighty God is here, when an Everlasting Father is available, when the Prince of Peace is on the throne of my heart, when He resides in the castle of me, there will be a peace that has no end.

There's no end to it. I'll always be able to experience that peace. So, over you I speak the peace of the Prince of Peace. You see, there's a name that's behind Christmas. It's a name above every name. His name is Jesus, the Prince of Peace. And when we invite Him in, He lifts our heads, He renews our minds, and He settles our hearts. May we truly take hold of His peace this Christmas season. The name above every name, His name is Jesus. Let me invite you to pray with me. So, Jesus, thank you for your name, for all the realities of you and your



kingdom. Thank you that you're just so good to us, and that you're going to teach us more about how we can lift up your name as we come into Christmas.

You're going to show us that along with your name is all of the realities of your kingdom and the emotions of the love that comes from you and the attributes of what it's like to be in your presence, God. I pray for our church that we would exalt your name. That we would see Jesus as a name that's above every name, that it's above our circumstances and our problems and our situations. I pray that we would be people who continue to practice so we can experience your peace. We would grab hold of the deep truths that you've been speaking to us all year long, and that because of that, peace would be the result. God, over every heart that feels unsettled or disheveled or out of sorts this Christmas season, I just speak the peace of God. I speak the hope of the Kingdom, the joy of the Lord, and the love of the Father over them.

Thank you, Jesus. You don't ever leave us. You don't ever forsake us. You're always with us. And of the increase of your government, your rule and reign, and your peace, there will be no end. We lean into it. We receive it by faith. We're so thankful for your love. We love you, Jesus, in your name. Amen.