

Series: Who Is God?
Jehovah-Shalom
The LORD Our Peace

Christmas is an interesting phenomenon. If you think about it, it's filled with contradictions. We're celebrating the birthday of Jesus Christ but we give each other gifts. We're remembering events that took place in a situation of extreme poverty but we spend over \$500 billion each year. We sing "Oh Holy Night," but Americans drink over 40% more alcohol than any other time of year. We promote Christmas as a very American traditional holiday and then we hang thousands of lights made in sweatshops in China.

And maybe the strangest paradox of all is we sing carol after carol about peace when all the while our lives are anything but peaceful. In fact, if you ask most people they'll tell you that Christmas is the most stressful time of the year.

Are we missing something in our Christmas celebrations? On that first Christmas Eve the angels made it absolutely clear to the shepherds who were tending their flocks on the hillside overlooking Bethlehem. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"* (Luke 2:13,14)

Christmas is about peace, but sometimes it seems like we're doing all that we can do to make it about busyness and stress.

We're in a series we're calling *Who Is God?* What we're doing is declaring who God really is based upon some of the names that the Bible uses to reveal God.

We tend to give names to our kids based on family or personal history. In the Bible, names are descriptive. Names teach us about people. What we've seen so far is that the names of God uncover, or disclose, character qualities and traits about Him.

This week we want to look at Jehovah Shalom, or God our peace.

I. Peace Is A Foundational Concept In The Bible

The word "peace" is used just under 400 times in our Bibles. Under the Law of Moses there were 5 different types of offerings that the Jewish people could bring before God.

There were burnt offerings, grain offerings, sin offerings, trespass offerings, and peace offerings.

If a guy has a fight with his wife and tries to make up to her by bringing her a dozen roses we might say he's bringing her a peace offering, but that wasn't what biblical peace

offerings were.

Peace offerings weren't offerings to make peace with God. They were voluntary celebrations of thanksgiving to God because the person offering it was already enjoying peace with God.

That person had already experienced God's forgiveness.

Turn to Psalm 100 page 585

Psalm 100 was used in the Jewish temple in connection with sacrifices of thanksgiving. The thanksgiving offering was part of the peace offering and it was offered in gratitude for God's special mercies.

Read Psalm 100

Why would this Psalm be read with a peace offering? Because it gives us reason after reason to praise God.

Look at what it says. We praise God because He's God. We're not God, He is.

We praise God because we're His people. We're the sheep, He's the shepherd and the shepherd cares for His sheep.

We praise God because he's good. God's mercy is everlasting.

Understanding the immensity and power of God and that He uses that power to care for us by showing us everlasting mercy gives us peace in the midst of the storms of life.

The Hebrew word for "peace" is *shalom*. Shalom shows up in what's probably the best known Christmas verse of all. Isaiah 9:6&7, *For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

The reason we can celebrate the goodness of God is because of what we're celebrating at this season of the year.

The Mighty God and Everlasting Father came as a child. He came as the offspring of a virgin's womb to bring 2 types of peace.

First He came to bring forgiveness and everlasting life. He came to be the sin offering. He came to sacrifice Himself on the cross. When we believe in Him we're forgiven.

The Bible says, *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Romans 5:1)

That's a peace we can have right now. That's a peace in our hearts knowing that we belong to God.

But there's a second type of peace that we haven't experienced yet. That's when the prince of peace returns to establish His kingdom. Then...*of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.*

That's a day we should be longing and praying for. That's why Jesus taught us to pray, *Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.* (Matthew 6:10)

I. Peace Is A Foundational Concept In The Bible

II. Peace Is What God Wants For All Of Our Lives

Seventeen of the 22 New Testament letters start with the words "grace and peace." Here's just a few examples:

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 1:3) That's the Apostle Paul.

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. (II Peter 1:2) That's the Apostle Peter.

Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come. (Revelation 1:4) That's the Apostle John.

Turn to Philippians 4 page 1153

Philippians is a letter written by a staunch Jew turned Christian missionary named Paul. Right now he's sitting in a Roman prison cell and can't say for sure what's going to happen next.

But all through this letter you read about rejoicing. If you're really rejoicing in God it's impossible to be anxious.

Suppose you find out that you have some serious medical problem, or that you're about to get laid off from your job, or that the IRS has audited you and says you owe them a bunch of money in back taxes.

Those are all things that can rob us of peace. Now look at this; **Read verse 4**

How can a guy who's in jail and has no guarantee of getting out alive say rejoice? Well here's the key. It's rejoice in the Lord. Not in the power of positive thinking. It's rejoice in God.

All of those "grace and peace" greetings say "from God." If I'm going to have peace from God it implies that I believe that He's in control. *It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves.*

No matter how traumatic a situation I find myself in I can rejoice that God is actually in control. If God could handle creating and running the whole world, He can handle my life. Even if I don't always understand it all.

So how do we have peace? **Read verses 6 & 7**

Follow this line of thinking very carefully. The Bible doesn't say, let your requests be made known to God and God will give you everything you want. It says bring your requests to God and He'll guard your heart and mind with peace.

We think, "Hey it only makes sense. The doctor says I'm in trouble so the way for God to remove my worry is if He removes my sickness."

"If God solves all my problems I won't have anything to worry about."

God approaches life so differently. We need to come to grips with the fact that in life there is no suffering, no adversity, no disaster, no problem, no frustration, that's greater than our God. Your cares are God's cares because He cares for you.

If we say we know God and we're constantly worrying, we're playing God. Our problem is big and our God is small. We're saying, "This one's too big for God so I'll have to carry it around for Him."

God's promise is clear. He promises a supernatural peace when we give our real concerns to Him in prayer. He'll guard our hearts.

Remember, as Paul wrote these words he was under Roman guard. He was imprisoned by a totalitarian government who had arrested him for stirring up trouble. Isn't it interesting that he says "peace" will be your guard. The peace of God will stand guard over the two areas that create worry: Your heart, with wrong feelings, and your mind, with its wrong thoughts.

When we come to the place where we realize that we've sinned against the God of the universe in our thoughts, words, and deeds and put our trust in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness, we experience peace with God.

We're no longer facing condemnation and judgment. That's what Romans 5:1 was about. So putting our trust in Christ as Savior brings us peace with God.

But that's not the kind of peace Philippians 4 promises. It's not peace with God, it's the peace of God.

See, it's possible to have peace with God as far as salvation and forgiveness goes and still miss out on having the peace of God in your life.

What God is promising here isn't the absents of trials and hardships in life. He's promising a way to have a quiet confidence on the inside.

Isaiah 26:3 promises: *"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You."*

Jesus said to His disciples: *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."* (John 14:27)

That's a peace that money can't buy, the world can't give, and accomplishments can't bring. It surpasses anything we could imagine.

So the peace of God guards against the intrusion of anxiety, fear, and worry.

But now notice the end of verse 7. True peace only comes through Jesus Christ.

According to the Bible there's no other place where we can find what we need to meet our soul's deepest needs.

Grace and peace shouldn't be the exception in our lives. They should be the rule.

I. Peace Is A Foundational Concept In The Bible

II. Peace Is What God Wants For All Of Our Lives

III. The Lord Is Peace

Turn to Judges chapter 6 page 240

The events described in the book of Judges cover about 300 years and describe a time in Jewish history when God was recognized both spiritually and politically as the King of Israel.

Tragically, the book of Judges records a long and shameful series of sinful rebellions against God by the Jewish people. The cycle goes like this: Rebellion, retribution, repentance, and restoration. That cycle is repeated again and again in Judges.

Judges 6 opens with Israel in one of those rebellion cycles.

Read verses 1-6

Here were the people of the living God hiding out in caves and dens. That's a pretty sorry place for the people who are in the center of God's promises of blessing to be.

Sin always ultimately brings shame and fear.

I John 1:9 says *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

The Psalmist wrote, *Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble; Incline Your ear to me; In the day that I call, answer me speedily.* (Psalm 102:6)

Sometimes God really has to bring the circumstances of life to bear on us. There's two basic responses you'll find in people. Some get angry at God and some turn humbly towards Him. The same sun can harden clay and soften wax.

These people's hearts were softened and they cried out to God. They didn't cry out against God.

They didn't blame God. They didn't say, "God how could you let this happen to us." They turned to God in faith.

So what's God's solution? Is He going to rain fire from heaven down on the Midianites? Is He going to send a deliverer on a white horse?

Not God. His ways are never our ways.

Read verses 11-12

The irony here is striking. You don't thresh wheat in a winepress. You thresh wheat out in the open. Gideon's hiding in fear of the Midianites and the Angel of the Lord address him as "mighty man of valor."

So here's Gideon's question. **Read verse 13**

Remember, at this point Gideon's not totally sure who he's talking to. But his question is, "If God is with us why are we suffering? If God is with us where are His miracles? It looks like God's abandoned us."

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt like God's forgotten about you? Let me assure you that never happens. God is there and God is at work.

Here's God's answer, **Read verse 14-16**

God says, "You're the man. You're going to save Israel from the Midianites."

Can't you just see Gideon looking around trying to figure out who this guy is talking to?

Remember, Gideon was the ultimate nobody. He's a poor Manassite, the least in his father's house. He's afraid, hiding out from the enemy, and thinks that God has forgotten His people.

I believe God delights in using nobodies to get His work done so that everyone will worship Him and not the one He uses.

You might be sitting here this morning thinking "Who am I that I could do anything for

God?”

That’s exactly what Gideon was thinking. Who am I? Now at this point I don’t know if he doubted because it all seemed so unbelievable or he doubted because he wasn’t sure he wanted to find out what God was going to do through him, but he did doubt.

In fact he asks for a sign. Were going to find out that Gideon was big on asking for signs.

Read verses 17-22

The Angel of the Lord is God appearing to His people in the Old Testament. The Angel of the Lord is what we call a Christophany, or an Old Testament appearance of the Second Person of the trinity.

No wonder Gideon’s shaking in his sandals. He’s face to face with God and he’s been saying things like, “Oh yea, if God is with us have all these bad things been happening to us? Where’s God?”

Whoops. God’s right in front of him. He figures He’s going to die on the spot.

Read verse 23

Peace be with you. Don’t fear. That’s the same thing that Jesus said to His disciples after the resurrection.

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” (John 20:19)

Jesus dies on a cross, He’s buried in a guarded tomb, the disciples are cringing thinking they’re going to be executed next and Jesus shows up in their midst. He didn’t even have to open the door to get in. No wonder they were scared to death.

How comforting those words must have been, *Peace be with you*. And so that’s what God says to Gideon. *Peace be with you*.

So...verse 24

He builds an altar and he calls it Jehovah Shalom, the LORD is peace. Not our armies.

Not our wealth. Not our power or prestige. But Jehovah God is our peace.

That's the theme you find from beginning to end in the Bible. God is our peace.

We have peace because the Prince of Peace has come. He came as an infant, grew to be a man, suffered for our sins on the cross, was buried, and rose again the third day.

Does that mean we'll never stumble in our faith or doubt?

Even with his face-to-face meeting with the Angel of the Lord, even though he builds an altar and calls it the LORD is Peace, Gideon still has to work his way through his feelings and questions.

Read verses 36-38

That's bold isn't it? "God, just so I know you really meant what You said, could You make this sheep skin wet and the ground dry?"

Gideon asks and God does it.

But now if that isn't enough look at what happens next.

Read verses 39-40

Now people have run off in a lot of different directions with this. Some have taken this as a cue to use fleeces. They say if you really want to make sure your doing what God wants you to do put out a fleece. Ask God for a sign.

Personally I don't feel comfortable with that approach. Gideon wasn't doing this because he had faith. He used the fleeces because he still struggled with doubt.

But what is striking to me is that God didn't reject Gideon. God didn't say, "Gideon O you of little faith," and open up the earth and swallow him up or zap him with a lightening bolt or something.

The Bible says, *As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.* (Psalm 103:13-14)

God is an awesome, majestic, holy, God. He is the Lord of all. He has every right to say

“Jump,” and expect us to say, “How high?”

But God pities His children. God knows what we’re made out of. He should. He made us! *It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

He knows how weak we really are. So God in His grace understands our questions, our doubts, our anxieties.

God’s goal isn’t to put us down, it’s to develop our faith. Gideon’s faith is going through a growth process.

He’s afraid, but he’s still willing to obey God. Before the fleece incident Gideon had already put out the call for fighting men and thirty two thousand responded and in the end he defeated the Midianites.

In fact, God whittled Gideon’s fighting force down to just 300 guys so in the end everybody knew it was God.

Jehovah God really is our peace, and if anything proves it it’s Christmas.

I don't know what kind of situation this Christmas season finds you in - good, bad or ugly. But make no mistake about it: God cares about it. He cares about you. And He wants to come into that situation, into your life, just like He came into Gideon’s life. Just like He came into the world on that first Christmas 2000 years ago.

The thing about God is, He doesn't force his way in. He only goes where people are ready to receive him.

That's why the angels announced the birth of the Messiah to lowly shepherds instead of the religious leaders. That's why Jesus was born in a manger instead of a palace. The people in the palace and the religious leaders weren't open to receiving him.

How about you? Are you open? He wants to be your peace, there's no question about that. What He’s looking for is a response.

Maybe that’s you this morning. Maybe you are ready this morning to say "yes" to the LORD our Peace.

The Bible says, *...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Romans 6:23)

It explains, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8,9)

It says, *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.* (John 1:12)

This morning, the best you know how, would you put your trust in the Prince of Peace as your Savior?