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What's in a Name? Prince of Peace: Messiah

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12/21/03

Isaiah 9:6 *“For unto 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.”*

Luke 2:13-14 *“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’”*

Today will be a study in foreign language, as we learn a term foreign to our ears. The word is “peace.” Can you say that with me? (Peace.) Let’s define it: Webster says: “freedom from war. An agreement to end war. Law and order. Harmony, concord. Serenity, calm, or quiet.” No wonder you’ve never heard of it before!

Something about calling the Messiah the Prince of Peace makes me think he brings peace with him. Isaiah told the people of Judah more about the Messiah than any other source in the Old Testament. He told them that this Messiah would be the Prince of Peace. And 700 years later the angels told the shepherds on the hillside 3 things: (first don’t freak out – then, there’s good news: there is a Savior, Christ (the Greek word for “Messiah”) the Lord was born. It was for all people (a new concept). The angel was joined by a huge crowd of angels praising God and saying *“on earth peace to people on whom God’s favor rests.”* Despite the King James’ translation “goodwill toward men,” the way the Gospel writer Luke really said it is *“God’s peace is given to those who are recipients of God’s good will or favor.”*

This month we’ve been looking at the names of Jesus and how he meets your deepest needs and we’ve noticed that God uses a descriptive name for Himself that matches every one of your deepest needs. Your understanding of God will affect every area of your life, and if you get a misconception about what God is really like, you will have unnecessary problems, emptiness and misery in your life that you weren’t intended to have. (And that includes a lack of peace!)

A Wonderful Counselor, always with us. A Mighty God who displays his power by emptying himself and serving us. An Everlasting Father who meets our needs and literally God’s Word. And a Prince of Peace, who quite literally can save us, and thus bring us peace with God.

So what does “Prince of Peace” mean and how does this affect my life? Let me say if you are looking for peace in your life because you feel internal and external conflict, you are normal! Only those who are unbalanced crave war, conflict, and pain. So, because everyone is so desperate for peace, we have to look at this today. We long for peace among nations, peace within our own nation, peace within our family, and, of course, peace within ourselves. In our psychology-driven age it’s the peace within ourselves, that’s the pre-eminent *felt* need.

But there are some forms of peace we don’t want: There’s a peace born not of inner spirit but death. Entire genres of music make millions of dollars with this message. Heavy metal rockers and rappers scream for this nihilist form of peace only found in death. A teen in the movie *River’s Edge* expresses it: “I’ve got this philosophy. You do stuff. Then it’s done. Then you die.” And it’s not just young adults struggling with

meaninglessness. Lots of people today are trapped in monotonous but important positions looking for something more. Our lives, like our palm pilots, are busy, busy, busy, full of things to do and people to see, but often empty of purpose. The message of the Bible is there is peace and meaning in life, but we've got to look outside ourselves.

There's a second (so-called) peace that God doesn't want for us, that he's determined to take from us: the peace that comes from the bliss of ignorance, the bliss of indifference, the bliss of a deaf ear and a hardened heart in the face of suffering, abuse, and injustice. Jesus himself said "*You think I came to bring peace? I came to bring a sword!*" (Matthew 10:34). If I just shut my eyes it will all go away. (lalalalalalala or hummmm).

We are more and more an individualized society. People don't want to remain isolated, but they're not sure how to be together. So we go for personal peace. "Personal peace means just to be left alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the world or across the city – to live one's life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed, regardless of what the result will be in the lives of my children and grandchildren." (Schaeffer) There's a peace we associate with insulation. We Americans are addicted to insulation. We go for peace - be left alone - until we have so separated ourselves from every discomfort that we're left alone, living life through the TV, DVDs, internet, addictions, and an extremely controlled, insulated, isolated, comfortable environment, justifying it by calling it "veg" time.

Whatever our world's definitions do or don't tell us, at least they tell me that underneath the casual gruffness of our world are parched souls gasping for life. These words of the Bible have never been more relevant or more needed. So if none of those definitions that we aim at so often is God's peace, then what is? *The Prince of Peace* himself says,

- John 14:27 "*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, nor let it be fearful.*"
- Matthew 11:28-30 "*Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my load is light.*"
- Romans 5:1 "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*"
- Philippians 4:7 "*And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*"
- Col. 1:19 "*For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*"

So the nature of the peace he longs for us to have is all based on "peace with God." The beginning of all peace – internal and external, is peace with God. It says nothing of an escapist sort of peace, but of reconciliation with God. For the Christian this reunion with God is based on the blood of Jesus at the cross. When we put our faith in Jesus, the great exchange takes place: he takes on our sin, and we take on his eternal life and character. What does God seek in all this? Faithfulness – full reliance on God's mercy, full welcome into your life, according to his truth, full acceptance of his pardon, full love for him and his children. Romans 5:1 "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*". That's why we call this baby being born the names Messiah, Savior, Prince of Peace: By his lifeblood he gave us peace with God.

So if the first aspect is peace *with* God, the second is that it brings the peace *of* God. Christ's people are now blessed with the peace *of* God. This is what you've been seeking. The peace of God is that peace which every last individual hungers for. The peace of God is that peace which God grants to his people as they face life's assaults.

Paul writes to the church in Philippi "*The peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*" The Greek word for "guard" (*phulassein*) comes from military engagements. It has two major thrusts. First, it refers to the action of an army whereby the army repels

attackers, holding them at bay so that while the attackers assault, even assault repeatedly, they never gain entry, never overrun, never triumph and thus never annihilate. The second place “guard” refers to the protection an army renders the inhabitants of a besieged city to prevent them from fleeing.

It "*passes understanding*". In fact, it passes "*all understanding*." It passes understanding because it isn't natural; it isn't generated by anything the sociologist or psychologist or neurologist can account for; it isn't circumstantial. There's no earthly explanation for it. There are parallels, of course, everywhere in the Christian life. Jesus says to his disciples, John 16:33 "*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*" In exactly the same way peace arises in the midst of the craziness and chaos of life just because Jesus Christ has triumphed over everything that doesn't make for peace, even as he gathers his people into his triumph.

It leads to freedom from being “all about me.” Peace with God brings the peace of God that allows us to work for peace among people. We are blessed, to be a blessing. Jesus said, “*Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called children of God.*” Matthew 5:9. When God calls you, he calls you to be a Peacemaker. He doesn't call you to be a “peacekeeper.” That very definition of a peacemaker means you don't go to the places where peace already exists. In our efforts, let's look to Jesus' earthly ministry: When he is made to suffer himself, he simply absorbs it. On the other hand, whenever he sees other people suffering unjustly, he acts without hesitation. He will defend the defenseless and protect the vulnerable.

You and I will be peacemakers if we can forget ourselves and our minor miseries long enough to be moved by someone else's victimization. If we remain preoccupied with every petty jab and insult and petty putdown, we spend most of our time thinking through our own vindication and we avoid truly helping others. We follow the Prince of Peace in every circumstance, high or low.

Engaging fully in life rarely brings peace. Engaging fully brings in the highs and lows of life. If we are out sharing with people, telling them “You have a God who loves you and you gotta acknowledge him and quit falling for the other gods.” Chances are they'll ignore you. And some of you who fully engage will receive callings that are really hard – gut wrenching. To others, your life looks like a bust. We don't know why. But in heaven, you will be in the company of Jesus. Jeremiah. Ruth. Paul. The martyrs. And many faithful ones whose names we don't know. If you are engaging fully and missing that peace, don't bail, because one day we'll face the one who had it hardest of all: He never bailed. Instead, you may need to cry out, “There's no more left in me...I'm totally dependent on You...I need you... Only in your will I am free and at peace.” And know this: Some of God's best work happens in the middle of war-torn places, and war-torn people.

Jesus doesn't make you normal, but healthy. (How could we look normal? We think we can hear God!!!) The Prince of Peace has been leading us in an invisible, spirited war, where lives are won and lost. And it's UNSTOPPABLE. The greatest war fought in human history is the war fought within the human heart.

Why do you struggle for peace? 4 reasons: It may be...

1. Some of our war/struggle is from living in a fallen world, so unlike the original design. We simply don't know why some things happen. That's why we draw our peace from that inner relationship with Jesus the Messiah.
2. Much of our war/struggle is because of our poor or wrong choices. You're doing stupid stuff you have no business messing with. You're on a crash course with your consequences. And you're not filling your time with the good stuff that God wants you to experience. Of course you won't experience the peace that passes understanding!
3. Some of our war/struggle is exactly from living the life God has purposed for us. When you live out your faith, you have entered into a spiritual battle.
4. Your war/struggle is because you're trying to live your life outside apart from God. Much of your war/struggle is because you are excluding God from the equation. You wind up frustrated because you are denying God's purpose for your very creation. You're missing out on the Prince of Peace and his promises for you.

No matter where your war comes from, know that the Prince of Peace came for you. His grace and peace are sufficient for your every need.

- He came, fully human, even to a world so fallen away from his original beautiful design, to be our Messiah – our Savior.
- He came for you, even if you're mired in the morass of your own bad choices.
- If you haven't put your faith in Christ, know that Christ came for you, that you could experience salvation and life to the full. It's not because you might die tonight, but because you will probably need to live tomorrow.
- He came to you who are staying faithful facing those difficult assignments whispering in your ear "You can do it – let my strength be yours, rest in me. I'm here for you."

We're going to have a "spiritual direction" moment: to clear the way so the Spirit alone can do what the Spirit alone wants to do. Ask: How am I doing, really? Your self, your family, your ministry, your choices. **THE PAIN LEVEL IS GREATER THAN WE THOUGHT.**

I'm inviting the gang to come up and simply sing some of the names of God. Listen, and latch onto the name you need right now. You can remain in your seat, or if you need to come to the steps and pray, you are welcome. Let him who is the Prince of Peace wrap his strong arms around you and hold you again...