Good morning! For those of you that don’t know me, my name is Matt Chesney and I am the director of youth and outreach here at Eagle Ridge and it is my honor to be speaking with you today. We are 2 weeks into our Advent season and today we get to talk about peace.

Peace is interesting. Everyone desires peace. It is something we all crave and are desperate for, yet peace can mean so many different things to so many different people.

* To a parent of small children – they just want some peace and quiet.
* To someone working in an office surrounded by office politics and back-biting – they just want a place where they can work in peace.
* To a person living in a war-torn country, subject to bombings, death, and destruction – they just want peace and safety.

Peace is one of those concepts that has so many different depths of meaning and function, depending on the context and the person. Which is probably why we have so much trouble finding it and achieving it – we all have different definitions or ideas of what peace looks like… or how it should be accomplished. But the one thing the is common among all of our definitions is that they all end up being \*\***Circumstance Dependent**.\*\* And we will come back to that more, but let’s take a look at God’s definition of peace expressed in the word: Shalom. – the Hebrew word for peace.

You may or may not be familiar with this word, but it’s biblical definition is much more complex than our English word, “peace.”

In the original language, Shalom has a variety of nuanced meanings, but it boils down to completeness or wholeness.

In God’s definition of peace, this is not circumstance dependent. It doesn’t matter if your kids are screaming, it doesn’t matter if there is drama in the workplace, it doesn’t matter if your life is literally in danger – Shalom (peace) means you are complete. You are whole. It’s not the absence of conflict. This is wholeness/completeness in the midst of conflict.

And you may be thinking to yourself… “Whole? Complete? I don’t have a hole through my body. I’m not missing a limb.” (hopefully) “So, do I have Shalom?”

Well, we’re not talking about a physical wholeness or completeness… we’re talking about a spiritual wholeness. A state of being aligned with God, where God dwells in you and you have surrendered to God’s will.

Surrender is an essential component of peace. Thought of another way… You can either be against God and God’s will… fighting him in a type of war… or you can surrender to him and live under his authority and rule in peace.

Again, you may be thinking to yourself… “War with God!?! ME? Never! I know better than to fight with God and go against Him!” and yet… we do it every single day. We ignore his prompting and guidance for our lives and try to do it our own way. THINKING that we know better.

We cling to things that are not of God, we Don’t follow his instructions for our lives, we rely on ourselves for the solutions to our problems, we hang on to unforgiveness, bitterness and sin instead of surrendering them to God and then we wonder why we don’t have peace.

Each of these things puts us at odds with God. They put us in the position of being our own god, our own idol – and we stop relying on and obeying God – which in turn, destroys any semblance of peace in our lives. Paul urges us in the following way:

Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. **7**Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Phillipians 4:6-7

God is the only source of Perfect Peace

If you know the story of King David… prior to him assuming the throne he was being hunted by the then-current king of Israel, Saul. David had done no wrong. He defeated Goliath. He played music for the king and soothed his spirit. He followed and obeyed God. And yet, because the people loved him more than Saul – Saul hated him wanted him dead. So, while running from cave to cave, hiding from his own countrymen and king, without a consistent source of food, and feeling betrayed by his own king – a situation that by ANY human standards was the OPPOSITE of peace… David wrote Psalm 23. (He understood that shalom is not circumstance-dependent)

**A psalm of David.**

**1**The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
**2**    He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
**3**    he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
    for his name’s sake.
**4**Even though I walk
    through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
    for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
    they comfort me.

**5**You prepare a table before me
    in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
    my cup overflows.
**6**Surely your goodness and love will follow me
    all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
    forever.

Let’s break this down a little bit and take a look at how David describes the peace that he has with God.

The Lord is my shepherd,…

This is a powerful way to start, especially for David. David WAS a shepherd. He knows the job, and how difficult it is. And, like in the video we saw, he knows how difficult it is to direct, care for, and protect a flock of sheep (that aren’t always inclined to listen and do what’s best for themselves). So, not only was he describing God as the shepherd, he was describing himself as a sheep. But more than that, this is a very personal statement. David doesn’t say The Lord is “our” shepherd… or “Israel’s” shepherd… he says, the Lord is MY shepherd. Let’s keep reading:

… I lack nothing.
**2**    He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
**3**    he refreshes my soul.

Being united with God, under his care and providence, means that HE provides for YOU. “I LACK NOTHING” – and then to emphasize the point David mentions green pastures (physical needs), quiet waters (emotional needs), and refreshes my soul (spiritual needs). God takes care of it all. And it should not be overlooked that David makes the claim that the Lord “MAKES” him lie down and leads him. Because that is what a shepherd does – they direct the sheep, and we’ll see that more in a second… but if you’re anything like me, you will not necessarily submit willingly, even if it’s for your own good. (which is why surrendering is so important). God will make you lie down and he will lead you if you’re being stubborn! And then:

He guides me along the right paths
    for his name’s sake.
**4**Even though I walk
    through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
    for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
    they comfort me.

This ties in directly to the point I just made, but elaborates. He is in control. He will guide you in the direction that is best for you. And even when everything around you appears to be falling apart, when the world is a mess, or your finances are a mess, or your relationships are a mess, or your job is a mess… even when you walk through the darkest valley… God is with you and guiding you down the right paths. And his rod and staff will comfort you. Real quick… The staff is the long stick that has a curve at the top that grabs the sheep around the neck and can redirect them when they are going the wrong direction – because they don’t listen well… And the rod is a big stick used for smacking a sheep when they don’t want to listen. Which do you need this morning? The staff or the rod? Both? But this goes back to Shalom and Peace that is independent of circumstances. EVEN THOUGH I walk through the darkest valley (or my favorite translation.. the shadow of death), I shall fear no evil.

**5**You prepare a table before me
    in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
    my cup overflows.
**6**Surely your goodness and love will follow me
    all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
    forever.

When we surrender to God, and allow him to be our shepherd we have a peace, a wholeness, a completeness, that passes any understanding. We have hope and a promise of goodness to come. A table in the presence of enemies. An overflowing cup. A room prepared in the house of the Lord.

There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? **3**When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

John 14:2-3

2000 and roughly 20 years ago God entered into our suffering as a man. Jesus was born so that he could not only draw us closer to Him, but so that He could bring peace with God. Not by taking away our conflict and strife, but by making us complete and whole in Him in the midst of our conflict and strife.

Isaiah 53:5 says:

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
    he was crushed for our iniquities;
**the punishment that brought us peace** was on him,
    and by his wounds we are healed.

That very first Christmas, the night Jesus was born, the human race was at war with God. Many of us today are still at war with God. We fight against his will. We fight against his plans. We hold onto bitterness and anger. We choose a path that leads to destruction. All because we believe (whether consciously or not) that we know better. I am begging you to step into his peace. Accept him as your shepherd. Listen to his voice. Allow his staff to guide you. Allow his rod to correct you. Allow him to provide for your needs. And experience the shalom that only comes from God.

And this brings us to our Steps of Obedience, which for today we are calling “Peace in Action” We need to put what we’ve learned into practice and apply it. So, continuing with the pattern developed last week… we need to first

1. Confess your disobedience.

If you have not yet completely surrendered to God’s authority in your life, then there is a war going on inside you. There are 2 masters fighting for control – you and God. And I promise you, you are not going to win that fight. Acknowledge the areas of your life where you have been or continue to be disobedient, rebellious, or closed off to God’s prompting. Maybe it’s being still and listening to what God wants to say to you. Maybe it’s using your gifts. Maybe it’s giving your time. Maybe it’s giving your money. Maybe it’s some attitude, behavior, or action that has become a destructive habit. It is time to confess and surrender.

Next, we need to

1. Praise God as your Good Shepherd and remind ourselves of what he has done and continues to do for you.

For this, I would like to encourage you to meditate on Psalm 23 this week. Recite it, memorize it, Sing it to God, whatever you do – invite God into it and speak those words to Him while you are engaging the Scripture.

And finally, we need to

1. Pray for those that don’t have Shalom/peace.

Now, I want to be clear. I’m not talking about praying for war-torn countries and people – like Israel and Palestine. Please, pray for them. They need your prayers. But specifically what I’m encouraging you to do here is to pray for the people around you that are stuck in this mindset that their circumstances dictate their level of peace. And you probably don’t have to look too far… we’re probably talking about people in your own family (or you!). But, pray for your family. Pray for the people in your office. Pray for that person that is always running around stressed out because the world or their life is a mess. Pray fro the person you see when you’re out shopping that is clearly frazzled and frantic. Pray that they learn and remember that God’s perfect peace is not about a circumstance… it’s about surrender. It’s not about an absence of trouble… it’s about allowing him to give you rest. It’s about a spiritual wholeness that only God can provide.

**A psalm of David.**

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