

The God of Peace

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[0 : 0 0] I'm sure that you would agree with me that we're living today in times of great anxiety and insecurity in our world more and more countries are increasing their nuclear capability extreme far-right parties are on the increase in countries such as France Germany and Austria to name a few there is the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine as well as the threat of further escalation in the Middle East some military experts are predicting a full-scale international war within five to seven years and urging their governments to prepare now furthermore world leaders are positioning themselves and developing ties and allies with other countries and leaders in preparation for the possibility of war there are also cranks and dangerous demagogues with too much influence and power it seems that peace isn't an easy objective to attain right now in the world and also we as individuals long for peace do we not peace from our inner restlessness our fears and our anxiety and our guilt anxiety about money our family relationships our children being accepted our identity having a meaningful life a sense of belonging a life partner to love and be loved but where shall we turn or to whom shall we turn to satisfy this spiritual angst for peace

I should say to you that the word peace in the Old Testament in the Hebrew is probably the best known Hebrew word among people who know the word if that's not a tautology and it's shalom I love that word myself I just love even it sounds peaceful does it not shalom and it's one of those wonderful words that's rich rich in its range of meaning it means things like well-being wholeness security safety authentic prosperity righteousness salvation peace who in the right mind would not want shalom but where shall we look meditation mindfulness self-help manuals the dozens upon dozens or hundreds

I should perhaps say of self-help books that you see in Waterstones the twelve rules for life by Jordan Peterson now I am not saying that people may not benefit from some of these books or some of these actions such as meditation and mindfulness I used to when I was working in a counselling capacity in Airdrie I used to not only recommend but help people with some of those things but what if that peace and lack of it in that inner conflict and hostility and guilt runs far deeper than simply looking for a wee bit of peace in this brief ephemeral temporal life what if it's spiritual and what if it's related to our relationship relationship or lack of relationship to God that's where we come to these verses in Hebrews now may the

God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant equip you with everything good that you may do his will working in as that which is pleasing in his sight I want to firstly draw your attention to this phrase the God of peace some academics only believe that

Paul wrote seven of the New Testament letters and one of the ways that they try to come to a judgment in these things is looking at the words in the letters to see the usual Pauline words quite a dangerous sort of strategy in many ways but and I'm not trying to suggest that Paul wrote Hebrews he may well have done it could have been Apollos or somebody else the writer doesn't really tell us so we don't need to know but certainly the phrase the God of peace is a Pauline phrase and you notice this phrase what it really is pointing to it's not only saying that God offers us peace which he does remember Jesus said peace I give you not as the world gives we are offered peace and remember the reading that

[8 : 06] I read Jesus in Ephesians he is our peace peace is not some sort of abstract unattainable thing out there somewhere if we want to know where peace is located it's located in the person of Jesus Christ he is our peace peace but it's not just saying that what it's saying is the origin the source the spring the fountain for the shalom that every single human being needs is to be found in

God could it even be saying something about the nature of God the being of God I'll let you think about that about the Trinitarian God who is utterly at peace with himself from everlasting to everlasting we saw those two pictures one with the storm and the other one with the boat in the calm sea the God of peace you know the first question I think we have to ask really isn't it is do we know this God of peace is he our God of peace have we found that peace which is so elusive when we're looking for it in this world so as

I say whatever else this phrase means God of peace it declares that God is the fountain source and origin of a peace only he is able to give us which each one of us needs I just said there which each one of us needs what am I talking about we read there from Ephesians and Paul said to these Gentile people who were recent converts he said to them you weren't always at peace with God you weren't always as Ruth pointed out in the verse from Romans 5 therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God that wasn't always the case said

Paul at one time you were alienated from God estranged from God cut off from God you had no relationship with God whether peace or any other relationship now that is the condition and state according to the Bible of every man woman boy and girl until they come to Jesus Christ peace and that is something far more profound and far more dynamic and far more like a paradigm shift and a life changing commitment than for example going to church going to church is a great thing but going to church should really presuppose in a way that we've been to

Christ for that peace and what is this alienation what's going on what's going on is that we want to run our own life what's going on is we want total control of our own life and what's going on is we're making an idol therefore of ourselves we alienate ourselves we estrange ourselves and here is the tragedy of that if you like because of our guilt therefore because of our philosophy of our world view of seeking to hold on

[13 : 52] Jesus said he that holds on to his life shall lose it and he that loses his life for my sake will find it we're upside down hope that's what Paul is talking about what about you are you estranged are you alienated from God the good news of the gospel is God will accept you anytime if you make your way to Jesus Christ now this statement here believe it or not is a benediction and you all know what a benediction is a benediction is at the end of the service and I will do it at the end of the service you pronounce a benediction let's stand for the benediction not now you you pronounce the benediction and this is what this is this is a benediction now may the God of peace who brought you again from the dead who brought again from the dead our Lord

Jesus but this is a benediction it's something more than a benediction I believe I believe that it's it's a kind of summary of everything that the writer to the Hebrews has been saying take this word shalom for instance the most central major part of this letter to the Hebrews or sermon because many thinkers believe it's got the structure and it has in a way you can see it making its successive points and it finishes with this benediction so what we have here is the writer summing up everything that he has said and in a sense you could almost say it's summed up in that word peace because he's been talking about our problem of guilt and sin he's been talking about the only priest that matters for any human being is somebody called

Jesus Christ and he has said that because Jesus Christ was resurrected because he lives forever his priesthood is forever and he can offer that peace forever and he secures that peace forever so there's a great sense in which he's taken a deep breath and he's thought about everything that he has been writing about in the entire letter to the Hebrews and he said may the God of peace but the second thing that he says well not really the second thing but the second thing I'm going to make it the second thing is the great shepherd of the sheep the great shepherd of the sheep when I first read that in this benediction

I thought where did that come from because it's all to do as those of you that maybe know the book of Hebrews it's all to do with the exploring the sacrifice of Christ comparing it to the priests of the Old Testament to the priesthood of Jesus in the New Testament is all about that exploring all of that where does he come where does he get this the great shepherd of the sheep the great shepherd of the sheep well of course it's been implied and what he's been telling us in terms of the work of Jesus Christ in terms of Jesus Christ's incarnation because he speaks about that doesn't he he said they it beheld that's an old word but it's the word that stuck in my head because it used to be the

King James version that I was reading as an early Christian it's a lovely word it's a brilliant word it almost compelled Jesus Christ it behoved him to take on flesh and blood so he's talking about this great shepherd implicitly and who is this great shepherd none other than the son of God none other than the second person of the trinity and he said it behoved him to take human flesh this great shepherd of the sheep and it behoved him to live a life as a human being an authentic human being just like you and just like me no less authentic and he walked the walk and talked the talk perfectly so that he could be himself not just the great high priest but the offering that would bring about this peace that would satisfy every hurdle if you like that we had made for ourselves by our actions and who is this great shepherd of the sheep and he tells us there when he uses the phrase now may the

[20 : 47] God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus now that's so important so he's got his you might say a word that captures his deity his divinity Lord and a word that captures his humanity Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep is the God man the one that John says in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God and the word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory can you feel I hope you can can you feel the intensity of the writer's devotion as he's saying these things now may the

God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep now I've not got much of my notes done and I've just noted the time so I'll be skipping quite a bit but don't worry about that I want you to note you to note this phrase who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus I want you to notice this phrase can you see what the writer is saying here now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus here is the critical person in this peace coming to be here is the critical event for this peace coming to be now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead now will be speaking to the for this peace coming to be now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead now will be speaking more on that this evening God willing as I have been tasked with the a statement in the Apostles Creed of the Resurrection but I want you to notice the link between the accomplishment of that peace and the bringing back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ this phrase bringing back from the dead is a very very interesting phrase 99 times out of 100 when any writer in the New Testament speaks about the resurrection of Jesus it's always in this context

God raised him God raised him and God not only raised him but he raised him from the dead here is this great enemy death it's tyranny it's rain it's rule this enemy that no one and no army in the world can defeat but there's a man called Jesus that has been raised from the dead who not only can but has defeated death quickly moving on this benediction now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ by the blood of the eternal covenant the question that comes here is on what grounds we mentioned about the God of peace being the source the fountain the spring and so on what are the deep origins of this peace and I also mentioned it's a peace that only God there's not two people at the table there's only one

God God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son here in his love not that we love God but that he loved us where are the mists of the origin of this peace notice the phrase by the blood of the eternal covenant now interestingly enough if you read Hebrews you will find especially in chapters 7, 8, and 9 that the writer has a lot to say about the concept covenant and this is a wonderful thing you know a covenant is an agreement usually between two parties each of their own conditions to fulfill from from the covenant but this covenant is an eternal covenant this covenant was first raised shall I say in the mists of eternity and that God pledged with himself to redeem prodigal mankind shalom safety security and this covenant is as sure and safe as God is truth finally quite happy in a way because there's quite a lot of thoughts there that I didn't get a chance to speak on because time is racing away from us so maybe there's another sermon there but here's the thing what is theology for what I've been sharing with you one might say is the theology of the God of peace is theology something that is offered for its own sake absolutely not look at what he's saying in fact you could say may the God of peace and start putting a bracket there before the word who and then covenant put a bracket there and you'll discover what this benediction is the object that it's actually aiming at may the in fact

I'll not say these words and you'll see it may the God of peace equip you with everything good that you may do his will working in us this God of peace working in us that which is pleasing in his sight it's a wonderful thing you know Christianity if I had more time is riddled with paradoxes and of course one of the paradoxes that it's riddled with is work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God that works in you I will equip you to do

[29 : 53] God's will and I will be working in you that does not mean that we're robots it still means that we as followers of Christ as recipients of that great peace it means that we're to think that the philosophy of our life is doing God's will it means that we're to think that the philosophy of our life is can I do something that pleases him surely lovers want to please the loved one surely that's part of the love that you desire to please the lover that person Lord it is my chief complaint but my love is weak and faint yet I love thee and adore oh for grace to love thee more

Peter lovest thou me let us all put our name there David lovest thou me you might say the climax to this benediction as we close is doxology doxology is just a word that means offering praise to God once we've done all our talking what we need to do is adore through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever amen