

Jesus is Our Peace and Reconciliation
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Wasilla Bible Church
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Good morning! For those of you who don't know me, my name is Joel. I'm the worship pastor here, and glad to be able to give Pastor Ashley a break this morning. Our senior pastor, Larry, has been in Africa on extended leave, and Ashley has been taking us through our summer sermon series that I've personally thoroughly enjoyed, each week looking at different attribute, different aspect of who Jesus is, and all drawn from short passage in Colossians chapter 1 where Paul just literally bursts into praise, describing the greatness, the magnitude of the Lord we've been given. Thus far this summer we've looked at "Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer", "Jesus is God Made Flesh", "Jesus is the Beloved Son", "Jesus is Our Priest and Interceder", and this morning we'll be looking at "Jesus is Our Peace and Our Reconciliation", drawn from verse 19,

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him [speaking of Jesus], and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross...

Jesus is our peace and our reconciliation. Those are two words you'll hear me say a lot this morning so I'll start with just some quick definitions. Peace is the absence of war or other hostilities. Often we use this in an internal sense, the absence of war or conflict within. This morning I'll be using it primarily in an external sense, absence of war or hostility with other people, with others. And reconciliation is the reestablishment of a close relationship. I'll be using them in conjunction just as Paul does, because in Jesus they function together like two sides of one coin—the absence of hostility and the presence of relationship. Jesus is both of these things, our peace and our reconciliation.

That's where we're headed this morning. Our goal is the same as the summer prayer focus that's been printed on the front of your bulletins every week this summer. It's a prayer from Colossians chapter 2, and right in the middle of it there's this phrase... "the richness that comes with the confidence of understanding." When we have a confident understanding of who Jesus is...His person, His nature, His ways...there's a real richness there for us, a richness to our lives, our souls; and conversely, when our understanding of Jesus is unclear, lacks confidence, there's a poverty. And so my prayer for this morning, my desire, is that God would encourage our hearts, knitting us together in love, and leading us into that richness that comes with a confidence of understanding, into a fuller knowledge of His Son, Jesus Christ, as we look at His word.

I'll ask you to turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2. We'll spend most of our time in the second half of the chapter where Paul makes the statement "He Himself [Jesus] is our peace." But we'll begin right at the beginning of the chapter so we get a little bit of background and context. Paul is writing to a group of believers in the city of Ephesus, and at this point in the letter he wants to remind them where they've been, and where they are now. And as chapter 2 begins,

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Paul begins, saying "You were dead," by which he doesn't mean physically dead because he specifies "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." You may have been physically breathing and walking, but you were walking according to the course of this world. You may have been physically alive, but spiritually you were dead, lifeless. But you were not alone. He continues,

Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

One of the things that strikes me most about this passage is the fact that it's past tense. It doesn't say 'You will be raised and seated...' We have been raised up and are seated with Christ Jesus in the heavenly places, which begs the question, "Really?" I mean, as I look around here this morning, this is a fairly nice gym that we're sitting in, but you'd be hard pressed to say this is the heavenly realms. So what does Paul mean by "You have been raised...", "You have been seated..."? Well, how does he begin the passage? You were dead...spiritually dead. And now, in the spiritual sense, you have been made alive with Christ and you have been raised, and you are seated with Him in the heavenly places. As believers, this is our spiritual reality. And yes, one day in the new creation we will physically be before the throne of our God. But even now, through Christ Jesus God has brought us into His presence.

And why would he do such a thing, would He take a sinful, obstinate people, dead in their sin, make us alive, raise us up, and seat us with His Son? Well, because He is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us. And to what end? For what purpose has He done this? Well, how does the song go that we just sang this morning?

*We have been raised, we are alive,
In the heavenly realms we are seated with Christ,
That we may know, age unto age,
The abundance of Your grace.*

God did this so that, in ages to come, He might show the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. God who made us alive, raised us up and seated us with Jesus so that He can continue to show us His grace, His goodness, forever and ever. The wonder and glory of our God! And consequently, we are left with absolutely no room to boast in ourselves, which is the point that Paul makes as he concludes his paragraph...

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

His grace is through and through; even the good deeds we do as Christians are by grace. God has prepared them beforehand for us. By grace God took us, dead in our sin, made us alive through Christ Jesus. This is the essence of the first half of Ephesians chapter 2.

With this in view, Paul makes a similar statement the Ephesians, but directed more specifically at their identity as Gentiles. He says, in essence, 'You were far, but in Christ Jesus you have been brought near.'

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision", which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Paul wants them to know that not only as sinners were they dead, but as Gentiles they were far. What does he mean by far? Well, they were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, which means they were not considered God's people, which then also means they were strangers to the covenants—the great, promise-filled covenants that God made with His people did not apply to them. They were without hope and without God.

But now in Christ Jesus you who were formerly far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

And so through Christ Jesus the Gentiles are no longer strangers to the covenants of promise, no longer aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, "...but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." Jesus has brought them near.

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

The Gentiles have been brought near to God's people, to God Himself, and it's through Jesus that this happened, through the cross. Jesus is the peace and reconciliation, and it's a twofold peace and reconciliation. It's between Jew and Gentile, bringing the two into one new man, and then bringing them both to God.

We're gonna look at the first aspect of this, first the reconciliation that Jesus brings between Jew and Gentile. Let's start with simple definitions. Who are the Jews? The Jews are descendants of Abraham. They are people who God called, to whom He spoke, with whom He made covenants, and to whom He gave the Law. And the Gentiles are everybody else. And there was a deep enmity, a hostility, between the two groups. There was a dividing wall, even literally. In the temple in first century Palestine, the Jerusalem temple, there was an inscription on the wall in the outer courtyard warning the Gentiles that if they passed this point they would have only themselves to blame for their death. There was a dividing wall figuratively, even literally; there was a great enmity, a great hostility, between the two groups. What was the source of the enmity? Well, it was political, it was ethnic, but above all it was religious. Paul tells us ultimately it was the Law of Commandments. The Gentiles were people who did not acknowledge the Law of God. In fact, the common term for Gentile that the Jews used was 'uncircumcised'. We see this in verse 11... *'you who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision."* Circumcision was a requirement of the Law that eventually became symbolic of the entire Law. And so to call the Gentiles 'Uncircumcision' was essentially calling them lawless. They were a lawless people. They did not acknowledge God's law. They disregarded it, and this was a great source of hostility for the Jews.

The ironic reality, however, is that while the Jews were given God's Law and generally acknowledged it as such, they did not keep it. Paul, himself a Jew, says just earlier in the chapter,

...we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh...and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

And so Jesus did what neither Jew nor Gentile could do—He fulfilled the Law. He lived a sinless, perfect life, and He took on, on the cross, in His flesh, He paid for the lawlessness of the Gentiles and the unlawfulness of the Jews, abolishing the hostility, putting it to death in His body, bringing Jew and Gentile together...both sinful people, bringing them together and bringing them also, ultimately, before God. Jesus is the peace and reconciliation between Jew and Gentile believers, and between all who believe in a holy God.

Paul continues; quoting a verse from Isaiah 57 he says

AND HE [speaking of Jesus] CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY [the Gentiles], AND TO YOU WHO WERE NEAR [the Jews]; for through Him we both [Jew and Gentile alike] have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Jesus brings Jew and Gentile together, but He ultimately brings us all before the Father.

This morning I'm wearing a preacher's hat, or tie as it were, but I do need to speak to you just a moment as worship pastor. It's not uncommon in contemporary American Christianity to hear people talk about worship music bringing us into the presence of God. Generally when I hear this I understand where people are coming from; but we do need to be careful here, because music in and of itself does not, can not, bring us into the presence of a holy God. What worship music does do, along with spoken prayer, Communion, offerings, Scripture reading, other aspects, elements, of our service—what worship music does is it provides a way for us to interact with God together. And yes, when we interact with the living God there is a very real sense of His presence in us and among us. Worship music provides us a way to interact with God, but Jesus makes that interaction possible. Jesus has brought us into the presence of God. He is the access point. He is our access, and He brings us into the presence of God in the power and the working of the Holy Spirit.

This summer as Pastor Ashley's been going through the sermon series, he's been emphasizing the present tense. Jesus Is the Creator and Sustainer; Jesus Is our Priest and Interceder... emphasizing that it's not just...these different attributes of Jesus, it's not just a past reality, but a present reality. Jesus, who is alive today, seated at the right hand of the Father...through His life and through His death, through His resurrection, through His life today is continuing to work these realities in our lives. It's a present reality.

So I'll raise the question—present tense...is Jesus still our peace and reconciliation? Well, living in Alaska we're kind of removed from Jew/Gentile relationships; but present tense, He still is bringing us reconciliation. First of all we see it right here in the text. Verse 14, *"He Himself is our peace,"* present tense. And we see it in the world today. In the Middle East Jew/Gentile relations are still very, very hostile. In New Testament times it was primarily

between the Jews and Hellenistic peoples and cultures. Today it's primarily between Jews and Arab peoples and cultures. There's still deep hostility...any news report will tell us this. But what we don't see on the news is the fact that Jesus, who Himself is our peace, is currently bringing peace and reconciliation between Jew and Gentile believers, between Israeli Christians and Palestinian Christians. Many of you have read the excellent book "Light Force" on our book cart. It's a book mostly about the Gentile church in the Middle East today, but there is a beautiful chapter on the reconciliation that Jesus is bringing about between Israeli Christians and Palestinian Christians. And it's not a superficial piece that overlooks wrongs done on either side. Rather it's a real and profound piece, because the wrongs committed by both sides have been paid for.

Paul in this chapter deals specifically with Jew/Gentile division. What about divisions among the Gentiles? As a society we're wrought with divisions. What about divisions between different groups of Gentiles? Can/does Jesus bring peace and reconciliation there? Yes! When Paul says "one new man", that implies those who believe in Christ are made into one new man; that implies a reconciliation between Gentiles as well. There are numerous examples of this throughout church history. I'll give you one this morning to which I have a bit of a personal connection.

My parents were missionaries in South Africa during the 1970s, which was during apartheid. There was a real hostility between white, black, colored. But in the church, in the Christian community, it was a different story 'cause Jesus had brought and was bringing reconciliation between believers. Not...again, not a superficial peace that overlooks wrongs done, but a peace that has paid for the wrongs committed by either side. Jesus brings peace and reconciliation through the cross between different groups of believers...Jew, Gentile, black, white.

But what about between individual believers? Again, the answer is yes, and for the same reason. He has paid for the wrongs done by either party. Our grounds for hostility has been abolished in His flesh. Yet, still sometimes we find ourselves holding up a list of our brother's or our sister's wrongs as if they were debts still owed, saying 'If you hadn't done this, this, this, this, and that, then I could be reconciled to you.' Even though Jesus says in Luke 17:4

"If your brother sins against you seven times in a day, and comes to you seven times, saying 'I repent,' forgive him."

Forgive him. It has been paid for. The wrongs committed by either party, our grounds for hostility, have been abolished in His flesh. This doesn't mean we won't have differences of opinion. But hostility, animosity, enmity...our grounds for that have been abolished in the person of Jesus Christ in His work on the cross. I know some of you this morning may currently be in ruptured relationship with another believer, wondering 'Is there really a way forward?' Yes, but only through Jesus. Only at the foot of the cross, where all who believe in Him stand forgiven. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, we are no longer to regard one another according to the flesh, but as a new creature in Christ Jesus. If the person you are trying to reconcile with is not willing to meet you at the foot of the cross, that's not in your power to control. But you can do your part by approaching reconciliation through the cross of Jesus Christ, for He alone is our peace and reconciliation...between one another and ultimately between all who believe in God.

Sometimes for us to approach reconciliation this way, through the cross, is a process. We err; we sin. We see this even in the New Testament. The Apostle Peter, who pioneered outreach to the Gentiles, later had to be rebuked for treating the Gentile believers in Antioch with condescension. Sometimes reconciliation is a process. You'll see this if you read "Light Force" and you read about the current Jew/Gentile reconciliation happening in the church in the Middle East today. It's not always immediate. Oftentimes it's a process. But it is real, and it's happening, and it's happening in Jesus.

Paul ends the chapter by saying that we are being fit together by Jesus, in Him. He gives this picture of the church as a temple with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. And in Jesus the whole building is being fit together, and in Jesus it is growing into a holy temple in the Lord. And in Jesus we are all being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. Christ Jesus brings us together as believers, and brings us ultimately before God. I love the repetition at the end of this chapter. "Christ Jesus Himself, in whom," "in the Lord, in whom,;" get the picture? It's in Jesus that we are brought together...Jew and Gentile, indeed all who believe, and all who believe in God.

So what's our application? Well, Paul just gives one simple application in the text. It's actually the first application that he gives in the book of Ephesians. He says simply, remember.

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ...but now in Christ Jesus you who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one...by abolishing in His flesh the enmity... so that in Himself He might make the two groups into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God.

Remember that Jesus Himself is our peace, our reconciliation, bringing together Jew and Gentile into one new man, indeed all who believe, and bringing us all to God. Paul says simply, 'Remember this.'

Now, too often we have a skewed view of what it means to remember biblical truth, and we treat remembering as having a vague notion of it, that we kinda know where we could find it if we looked it up, but we don't really keep it in mind. And then something happens and sparks a memory...say, a ruptured relationship with another believer, and we think, 'Oh, yeah, reconciliation. I think that's somewhere in Ephesians. Let me see, let me look...oh, there it is. "He Himself is our peace." Now I remember.' 'Now I remember' in that context is a bit of an overstatement. If I actually remembered, I would have already had it in mind. Let me give you an analogy. Say I come home from work on March 11th, and my wife, Naomi, greets me. I greet her. "Do you know what today is?" she asks. "Yeah, March 11th." "And is there something special about today?" "Apparently there is. Oh, wait, I think it might be your birthday. Could I see your driver's license a second? Thanks. Now I remember...it is your birthday!" Bit of an overstatement. If I actually remembered I would have already had it in mind. To remember means to have it in our minds, in the forefront of our thinking. This scenario is laughable, but too often that's the way we treat biblical truth.

Jesus Himself is our peace, made the two into one new man, brought both in one body to God. Remember this. Keep it in the forefront of your thinking. Keep it in mind. You recall our focused prayer for this summer, the richness that comes with the confident understanding. If our understanding of who Jesus is is vague, unclear, lacks confidence, there's a poverty there. If we forget this truth we risk trying to be reconciled with another believer in some way other than through the cross of Jesus Christ. We risk trying to be reconciled to God in some way other than through Jesus. We risk taking for granted the peace and reconciliation available to us, both to other believers and to God Himself. So remember...Jesus Christ is our peace and our reconciliation, both between Jew and Gentile; indeed, between all who believe and God.

I'll ask you to stand with me and we'll close with our prayer of witness. And as we do so I want to give you one more reason to remember this truth. God has placed us in the lives of people in this community who have never been reconciled to God, and whose souls need this reconciliation. And God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting the trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. There are people in our lives who need to hear the word; they need to hear the truth that Jesus Himself is our peace and our reconciliation.

[Congregation sings the prayer for witness song.]

Go in the truth and grace of our Lord. You're dismissed.