

Peace at Last

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 5th of August 2001. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Peace at Last and is from Romans chapter 5 verses 1 to 11. Please be seated.

And you may like to have open page 917 in the Bibles at Romans chapter 5, page 917. Perhaps the most controverted issue in Australian society in recent years has been the issue of reconciliation. We ask the question, what will achieve reconciliation between Indigenous Australians and other Australians? Will a prime ministerial sorry actually be sufficient?

Or will more need to be done? Or as some would argue, isn't there already reconciliation? Does anything more need to be done? Now of course Australia is not the only country that faces issues of reconciliation.

[1 : 14] Indeed in some countries it's a much more severe issue than here. In Rwanda, how will Tutsis and Hutus ever be reconciled after the genocide of 1994?

In the Balkans, could we ever expect to see reconciliation between Serbs, Kraats, Kosovars, Albanians and the other different ethnic groups in the Balkans?

In Northern Ireland, centuries of unrest and conflict have made us all doubt that reconciliation will ever be possible in a country like that.

The same in Israel, between Israelis and Palestinians. On a smaller but equally important scale, the same applies for reconciliation between individuals.

How do estranged couples find reconciliation? All too rarely these days it seems. How do feuding neighbours find peace?

[2 : 17] Can Michael Wooldridge and Dr Karen Phelps ever really be reconciled? How can people who refuse to speak to each other ever come to voice friendship?

What creates reconciliation between squabbling siblings? Where no love is lost, how can love be found? Where umbrage is taken, how can peace be given?

Where daggers are drawn, can arms ever be put down? What turns acrimony to acceptance or loathing to love?

All too often on both the international, the national and the personal or family scale, reconciliation is an elusive goal. There may from time to time be a cessation of fighting, perhaps an uncertain truce, or a silent but still sour standoff.

Politically brokered peace agreements rarely end the hatred. An in-court or out-of-court settlement does not end anger or disharmony.

[3 : 29] Reconciliation is hard to obtain. Most countries in the world give evidence of that. And many families still feel the pain of the lack of reconciliation.

And certainly saying sorry is barely sufficient. What we've seen in the last few weeks is that human beings without exception and God are alienated from each other.

They are in a state of enmity, caused initially by human beings failing to honour God as God, exchanging his glory for idolatry and lies. In response, God rightly and righteously vents his anger on human beings who fail to honour him as God.

There are no exceptions in this. All human beings we've seen fall short of God's glory. And all human beings we've seen stand under, rightly so, the wrath and anger of God.

But we've also seen in the last two weeks, at the end of Romans chapter 3 and last week in chapter 4, that through faith in Jesus Christ, God acquits sinners.

[4 : 40] Indeed, he declares them righteous in his sight through faith in Christ, because Jesus died a sacrificial death for the sins of the world. The penalty for sin is paid, God's wrath is propitiated or

appeased, and sinners are redeemed from the power of sin.

That is a mighty act that God has done in Christ, in order that his anger is averted and propitiated, our sins are atoned for, and that we can have a relationship with God.

You see, it's not just that we're acquitted or declared righteous in God's sight, but as this passage tells us, we have peace. Therefore, since we are justified by faith, that is, since we are declared righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ, we have peace.

Peace with God. The enmity is over. The hostilities have ended. The hatred is gone. The wrath has been averted. Friendship has begun.

God no longer has anything against us, though we remain sinners, because our sin is paid for and atoned for by Jesus' death. God has changed his attitude towards us.

[5 : 56] Instead of being an attitude that brings righteously his wrath, he's gone from wrath to peace, from condemnation to justification, from alienation to reconciliation.

This is more than an uneasy truce. It is not that God has just put down to one side his arms against us, but he has his finger ready to pick them up again.

It's not that God is keeping us at arm's length, saying, yes, this peace is not really peace, it's detente, it's a ceasefire, a temporary state of affairs.

Not at all. When we're told that we have peace with God, this is real peace, real harmony, real reconciliation. Alienation gone, reconciliation begun.

Enmity gone, and friendship begun. This is peace. This is real peace. Peace with God.

[6 : 55] In Western society in recent years, there's a growing popularity for Eastern religions. And the main reason for that is a desire for peace.

A desire for inner peace. Peace and calm. You see it in those who go off to become Buddhists or Buddhist monks.

Peace. They want to meditate. They want to get out of the rush of society. They want to feel within them a subjective inner peace. It's not a bad goal.

Some of them find it. But the peace that's described here is more than that, and more important than that. The peace that's described here is not just an inner calm, a subjective peace within.

Though I think that that may be a result of what's described here. But more importantly, the peace that's described here is an objective peace.

[7 : 56] A peace with God. A changed state of affairs, more than a changed state of mind. It is that God and human beings, through Jesus Christ, are at peace with each other.

It is a peace that is secured by Jesus' death and resurrection. But not only peace. That's just one benefit or one fruit of being declared righteous through faith in Christ.

Not only do we have peace, but also verse 2 goes on to tell us, through Jesus we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand. That is really saying we have access to God.

Behind that is the notion of a person who introduces you to somebody who is important. It is really the word access is about an introduction, an introducer, if you like.

And Jesus is our introducer. He's the one who brings us access with God, direct access with God. That is, he's not going to fob us off on some junior angel in heaven saying, look, I'll handle your matters, God's too busy for you.

[9 : 01] We're not going to be put on hold on one of those endless bank telephone lines that tells you that your call's important, please wait. The introduction and access that Jesus brings us to God is direct.

Every door opens before us as we go to God's throne of grace, as indeed we've just sung. We're not going to be stuck in some outer court of heaven pretending that we've actually come into God's presence when he's in some inner court.

Not at all. We have direct access to the very throne of God's grace, to God's very presence. The lines are connected, the doors are open because of what Jesus has done for us.

And there won't be any bureaucracy that will keep us on some outer call or outer court. We have access through Jesus Christ to God himself.

But the sense of verse 2 is a little bit more than that. It is this access in which we stand. And the sense is that this is a permanent and enduring access.

[10 : 08] It's not just on one special day of the year that your number comes up so you've got access to God. But it is an access to God that lasts and endures and we can rely upon it and be sure of it every day and every minute of every day.

Henry VIII was an impetuous sort of king. He went through a number of wives as you know and he went through a number of political advisors. In those days they didn't have prime ministers but in effect he went through several.

Some of the famous ones include Woolsey, Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell. He went through various archbishops of Canterbury who in those days were much more important than they are now.

But it was easy to fall out of favour with Henry. He was a little bit fickle. So being his wife was no guarantee that you'd stay his wife. Being his chief advisor or chancellor was no guarantee that you'd stay being his chief advisor or chancellor.

And being an archbishop of Canterbury was no guarantee that you would stay being his archbishop of Canterbury either. And so various of these famous people wives, chancellors and archbishops of Canterbury ended up in the Tower of London at different points.

[11:18] Some got out some went back in and some were killed. For a time they had access to Henry VIII. Chancellor, archbishop of Canterbury, wife they all had access to him but it was an unreliable access.

It depended a bit on his mood whether you were in favour or not. But with God the Supreme King we have reliable access to him every minute every day for the rest of our lives and it is guaranteed and secured for us by Jesus' death on the cross.

We don't need to worry about whether God's in a good mood today. Whether somehow we've fallen out of favour with God today. We stand in this access and we stand in a permanent way in this access to God through Jesus Christ.

this is great access indeed to the sovereign king of the universe. But not only that we've got peace we've got access but thirdly the end of verse 2 we boast in sharing the glory of God.

We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. Human beings we've been told have exchanged the glory of God for idolatry and lies. We've fallen short of the glory of God but now because of what Jesus has done we can boast in our hope of sharing in the glory of God.

[12:42] The glory to which we've consistently fallen short in our lives is now something that we can boast in and hope in. Now at the moment you probably know that our government is telling us indeed boasting that it is bridging the gap or closing the gap for medical expenses.

So as far as I understand it you go to a doctor or a hospital you are covered to some extent at the moment by some medical fund or Medicare but you sometimes have to pay the gap. The government is saying we're closing the gap.

No longer will you have to pay the difference between what health insurance or Medicare will give back to you. Well Jesus has closed the glory gap. That is we fall short of the glory of God consistently in our lives.

The glory of God is God's perfect standard but Jesus has closed the glory gap so that we can boast with confidence of sharing the glory of God. No longer do we consistently fall short but Jesus has bridged the gap.

He's covered the gap so to speak so that the glory of God is something that we can boast in and have certain hope about that we will share in one day. And that is not arrogance or pride.

[13:54] We're not boasting in something that is our own achievement but we are boasting or rejoicing in sharing or the hope of sharing the glory of God because of what Jesus has done not because of anything that we have done.

And because it's what Jesus has done it is not arrogance or pride. Confidence yes but not pride or arrogance. Now that's a marvellous picture for Christians.

We have peace we have access and we have a confident sure hope of sharing in the glory of God. We may well think it's a bit too good to be true. It certainly doesn't quite reflect the reality of this life. Paul anticipates that problem when he comments about sufferings because it seems that probably people were saying that sufferings in this life seems to thwart all these good things peace access and the confident hope of sharing in the glory of God.

So what about sufferings? Are they a sign of God's disfavour on us? No says Paul but rather he says in verse 3 that we can also boast in our sufferings.

[15:00] He doesn't mean that we're masochists and we think it's great to suffer but rather we boast in our sufferings because we can see why there is suffering and where it is headed. Our sufferings firstly produce endurance.

That is suffering toughens faith. It strengthens faith. Just like physically you need to exercise so that your muscles are tough so that it can endure more arduous types of physical exercise so too suffering is a good thing because it strengthens the faith of Christians.

I've heard the story of a man who was brought up in a Christian family a very devout very Christian family. He himself exercised his own Christian faith was very involved in church life.

He married a girl from the church and they stayed in the church they were committed church members committed Christians fine examples brought up their children and then in his mid-30s surprisingly to everyone went off and committed adultery.

People were shocked. How could this man in his mid-30s who's got everything he needs good job good family Christian family church membership that goes back till he was born Christian parents and kids that are being brought up in the church and so on how can this happen?

[16 : 25] And in the end it seems that what had happened in effect was that his faith had never been strengthened or toughened up through any suffering. His life had been relatively easy.

I don't mean that in a critical way that he'd been sort of coddled through being a Christian but his faith had never really been put to the test and the first temptation that had come along that was serious weak faith succumbed too readily to it.

suffering produces endurance it toughens our faith to resist temptation and to withstand troubles and strife and trial suffering leads to endurance endurance then produces character that is a character that is proven and tested and has come through the trials of suffering and character leads to hope partly because as we see our character being refined by God we realise his hand upon us and we realise the certainty of the goal to where our life is the hope of sharing in the glory of God that's the chain that Paul describes in verses 3 and 4 sufferings are not thwarting God's promise and they're not thwarting the peace the access and the hope of sharing in the glory of God but rather they're actually equipping us for those very things and then Paul says hope does not disappoint us now hope often disappoints us dad promises his son on Monday a special weekend treat the very sort of thing that will keep his son anxious and excited all week come Saturday he says to his son

I'm sorry son I can't do it I've got to work today hope is disappointed you go for a job interview it seems very optimistic they almost offer you the job you go home excited and full of hope but the letter never comes and the phone call never comes you're in fifth spot after round 18 hopeful optimistic and four weeks later you're ninth the doctor gives you good medical results the treatment seems to have worked and full of hope and buoyant you go out and some days or weeks or maybe months later the problems recur we're full of hope when a peace agreement is signed and then another bomb goes off hope in our frustrated world often betrays us it is often an illusion for many hope is a cruel ride it stops prematurely and leaves us stranded the reality fails to live up to the expectation and the hope but Christian hope is not like that

Christian hope does not disappoint us verse 5 says hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that's been given to us hope is certain sure and definite for Christians because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who's been given to us not only are Christians declared righteous not only do Christians have peace not only do Christians have access and not only can Christians boast in a hope of sharing in the glory of God but Christian hope is secure because God has given his Holy Spirits to Christians who pours God's love into our hearts but there's a problem with that why does that make hope so certain why does the Holy Spirit in our hearts pouring God's love into our hearts why does that make hope certain and never to disappoint I've married lots of people and each one of them has declared a love that will endure a love for life but like

[20 : 36] Elizabeth Taylor at least six of the people I've married are no longer married to the people I've married them to and I'm easily cynical when people declare undying love so to say that hope does not disappoint because of God's love in our hearts does not by itself convince because I've seen human declaration of love time and time again that does not endure and that dries up and disappoints so why can Paul say that hope does not disappoint because God's love is in our hearts by God's Holy Spirit the reason why hope does not disappoint because of God's love is because the quality of God's love is greater than the quality of human love and that's the argument for the rest of this section verses 6 to 11 to show why God's love does not disappoint human love does all too often but God's love doesn't because it's different you see the best human love that you can find might actually die for a good person it probably won't die for a righteous person that is a person who

is to be respected a person who is good sort of upright but for a good person that is a person who's not only respected but is loved somebody who's an appealing person or attractive person we might actually envisage somebody dying for them rare granted but possible that's what Paul says in verse 7 indeed rarely will anyone die for a righteous person an upright respectable person though perhaps just perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die that's the highest human love but God's love is greater verse 8

Paul goes on to say but God proves his love demonstrates his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us now the issue here is about who we are more than the fact that Jesus died Christ died for us who are we that Christ dies for us we're not righteous people that he dies for us we're not good people that he dies for us he doesn't die for us because there's something attractive and lovable and lovely about us we are sinners verse 8 says we are people who've exchanged the glory of God for idolatry and lies and to live our own lives and yet despite the fact that we're sinners Christ dies for us we are enemies of God verse 10 says and yet while we're enemies Christ died for us we are ungodly people verse 6 says and yet while we're ungodly Christ dies for us there's nothing righteous or good about us at all there's nothing in us that would prompt love from Jesus so great that he would die for us we are weak verse 6 says at the beginning not physically weak but morally weak and yet

Christ dies for us they say that God helps those who help themselves but that's not true God helps the helpless and the weak the people who cannot help themselves and cannot save themselves see what kind of love is this that Jesus dies for people like us who have nothing to commend them before God at all you see God's love is not prompted by our loveliness or our lovability God loves not because of what we are but because of who he is and no wonder the hymn writers keep coming back to the word amazing to describe this love amazing love oh what sacrifice the son of God given for me love so amazing so divine amazing love how can it be that thou my God should die for me this is love to the loveless shown that they may lovely be love divine all loves excelling how deep the father's love for us how vast beyond all measure that he should give his only son to make a wretch his treasure and that is why hope that is based on God's love will never disappoint us because

God's love will never fail because God's love is a love that will never let us go I remember when I was in primary school walking home from school with friends and we'd pick flowers out of the garden of the houses we'd walk past we'd have a little flower in our hand as we walked along the street and we'd be going she loves me she loves me not she loves me she loves me not and 50% of the time we were disappointed we long to be loved and we long to be loved by God how do we know God loves us not because there happened to be an odd number of petals on a flower not just because he tells us though he tells us often we know God loves us he demonstrates his love he proves his love for us in the while we were sinners enemy ungodless and weak Jesus died for us love is proven in such sacrificial action how does that ensure then that hope will not disappoint us God has done the hard thing already for us anything else he'll do is easy by comparison imagine I was to offer you two presents both of them not either or but both I offer you a luxurious house and a bar of chocolate imagine next week I give you the bar of chocolate and say the house is coming I suspect you would doubt you'd get the house but if next week I gave you the house and said next week the chocolate's coming I think you'd be pretty confident that I'd give you a bar of chocolate because I've already given you such an extravagant thing now don't get your hopes up let me say but if the hard thing is done first we can be sure the easy thing will also be done and the hard thing has been done by God Jesus dying on the cross for us is the hardest thing of all and it's done and therefore we can be sure that our hope will not disappoint us because anything else that God will do is easy by comparison that's what verses 9 and 10 say much more surely then now that we've been justified by his blood that's the hard thing and it's done so then will we be saved through him from the wrath of God that's easy by comparison hope will not disappoint us because the hardest thing has been done and verse 10 says the same in slightly different words for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his son that's the hard thing

[27 : 56] Jesus dying for us then much more surely having been reconciled will we be saved by his life the hardest thing is done already God's love is demonstrated in the hardest thing possible hope won't disappoint us because God's love we can be sure about and whatever else he needs to do on that final day to save us from his wrath and give us life we can be sure he'll do so then Paul concludes this section but more than that we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ

through whom we've now received reconciliation we can be sure we can be confident we can be assured of where we stand with God how good indeed to know God's love is greater than human love that God's love is sure and will last forever that God's love is demonstrated in Jesus dying for us when we did not deserve it and that is a guarantee and sure hope that hope will never disappoint us and that all

God's promises will be fulfilled for us one day in heaven how good to know that to be certain of that to be assured of that that we stand declared righteous by God that we have peace with God we've got constant access to God and we can boast with confidence in the hope of sharing in the glory of God and it is grounded in the love of God for us as seen in Jesus death for us sinners us enemies us weak ungodly people who did not deserve it and yet out of his great love for us Jesus dies for us this is a love that will never let us go and we can be sure of that forever you and in T you