

He is Our Peace

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Can I add my welcome to Vijay and Michelle's? It's great you could tune in. And can I also add my happy day, happy Father's Day greetings to all the dads out there as well.

Well, we're continuing with our series through Paul's letter to the Ephesians. And I wonder, as humans, we often want peace in life, don't we?

Whether it's peace in the workplace or peace in the home, particularly as lockdown drags on, or even peace in the world, like in Afghanistan or Myanmar.

This year actually marks 50 years since John Lennon wrote his hit song, Imagine. It's on your screens. He writes, imagine all the people living life in peace.

You may say, I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us and the world will be as one. You see, he longed for peace in life, didn't he?

[1 : 04] And that's what humanity does. And as we return to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he reminds us today that we as Christians have peace in Christ.

This is part of our privileged place in Christ. Remember, the first half of the letter is all about helping us to see our privileged place in God's plan.

That's centered on Jesus. And that's why on your screens, the title slide there has a cross just under the word Ephesians, because it's all centered around Jesus.

I don't know if you've noticed that. So in chapter one, we saw the blessings that matter are the ones that we have in Christ. And then Paul prayed that we might know the hip we have in Christ, our hope in Christ, God's inheritance, which is us in Christ.

He's longing to have us with him in the new creation, but also God's power for us who believe in Christ. And last week, we saw God's grace in Christ, that we were once dead in sin, but now made alive in Christ, raised, seated, secured in Christ, all by God's grace, his great generosity to each of us who don't deserve it.

[2 : 26] And last week ended with the verse 10, just before our passage today, where we were reminded that we are God's handiwork, God's new creation in Christ, Jesus, to do good works.

We'll see some of those good works in the second half of the letter. But as Vijay said last week, this is the story for each of us as individuals. But this week, Paul unpacks what it means for us as a people, that we're not just new individuals, but a new people.

And that's why he starts verse 11 with the word, therefore. Therefore, in light of what God has done for us each as individuals, remember what this now means for us as a people collectively.

And he helps us to understand it by firstly asking us to remember who we once were. So point one in your outlines and verse 11 in your Bibles are on the screen, if that helps you to write on the outline.

So verse 11, Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and are called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, which is done in the body by human hands.

[3 : 45] Now, just to explain, in Jewish society, there are only two types of people in the whole world. There are Jews who had the mark of circumcision. Well, the men did.

And there are non-Jews or Gentiles like us who were called the uncircumcised. And so you were either one or the other. You were either a Jew or a Gentile.

And Paul says to us Gentiles as a people, Remember who you once all were. See verse 12?

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

You see, we as a people were once separate from Christ. And he lists that one first, because no Christ means no citizenship with Israel, no part in God's promised future, no hope and no God in the world.

You see, before Christ, before being a Christian, we were once no-hopers and distant outsiders. I don't know if you've ever been excluded by a group or left out by others.

[5 : 09] I remember as a kid, as a teenager at high school, someone had a big party, and they invite many of my friends, but they didn't invite me. It hurts, doesn't it?

It makes us feel like a no-hoper, can't it? A distant outsider. But you see, before Christ, that's what we were. Our sin excluded us and left us out, made us no-hopers and distant outsiders, though we probably didn't realize it at the time.

And so Paul says, remember you were, so that you might realize your privileged place in Christ now.

See, Paul says, remember, remember what a no-hoper you were, a distant outsider you were. So you'll see how good it is to be in Christ now.

So point to verse 13, You see, we who were once far have been brought near in Christ Jesus.

[6 : 26] Now, before Paul unpacks just how good and privileged that is, he explains how it happened, how Christ's blood brought us near.

So see verse 14, he starts to explain with the word for or because, Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two groups, Jew and Gentile, one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh, the law, with its commandments and regulations.

Christ brings peace, you see, bringing us near both to God and to each other, making the two groups, Jew and Gentile, one.

How? Well, by his death, he brought down the wall that divided us and created hostility between us. Walls do that, don't they?

They divide and create hostility. I mean, think of Trump's war between the US and Mexico, or even in Australia, the closed borders are like walls, aren't they?

[7 : 36] Dividing us and creating tension and hostility between our political leaders. Or think of the war between Israel and Palestine. It's such a tall war, isn't it?

And it runs, on the next slide, for miles and miles. It's supposed to bring peace, but it actually incites violence, which is why there are calls to bring it down, to reboot the way of peace.

In computer language, Control, Alt, Delete, is a way of rebooting your computer. Well, for PC users, anyway, and not for us, Apple, Apple, Mac users, which are a better computer.

Actually, Tim Walker is about to mute me because he's a PC man. But anyway, the point is, this is what Christ has done for us. He's brought down the wall that divided Jews and Gentiles.

He brought it down and rebooted the way to peace. So what was this wall that divided us? Well, it was the Old Testament law with its 10 commandments and all its ordinances.

[8 : 45] It taught the Jews to live separately from the Gentile nations by telling them who to worship, what to eat, and how to treat one another. Now, the law was given by God.

And so it was good. It is good. It showed them how to live well, how to love others, and how to be righteous before God. And it made Israel a light that would attract the Gentiles to God.

As Moses said to Israel in Deuteronomy there, that the law will make the nations say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

And it will attract the Gentiles to Israel and to God. And the Jews were then to welcome the Gentiles in. But instead, it made the Jews think they were superior to the Gentiles and kept them out.

In fact, the Jews even added more laws that God did not give. Laws like how they weren't supposed to even associate with the people from the nations, the Gentiles, which created more hostility between them.

[9 : 58] The irony, of course, is the Jews, like us, couldn't keep all of God's law anyway. Like us, they kept on sinning. And because they couldn't keep the law themselves, then it separated them from God too, and created hostility between them and God as well.

And so although the law is good, the sinfulness of people meant the law created hostility. Horizontal hostility between people and vertical hostility between us and God.

But when Christ died on the cross, he paid for our sins, made us righteous before God. It was as though he pressed control, alt, delete, and rebooted the way to be right with God.

Not by law, but by his blood. The law is still good, and it still teaches us things about God, so we don't rip it out of our old Bibles. We don't rip the Old Testament out.

But verse 15 says that Christ has set aside the law in his flesh at the cross. In other words, his death replaced the law as a way to be right with God for all people, both Jew and Gentile.

[11:18] And a part of his purpose was to bring us together in Christ, to recreate us, not just as individuals, as verse 10 said last week, but as a new people, a new humanity, as we read this week.

So the rest of verse 15, his purpose was to create in himself, in Christ, one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.

You see, both groups are now made right with God through one person, Jesus. And by both Jews and Gentiles coming to Christ, they come together as one new group, one new humanity called Christians.

And so have peace with one another. It's kind of like this on the next slide. We're all, you know, we're either Australian, Chinese, Persian, Indonesian, Sri Lankan.

We follow Collingwood or Essendon or don't follow footy, but cricket instead. But what happens when we come to Christ, if we press play, as we come to Christ, we are united in him.

[12:27] Here we go. I worked hard on this. Notice we still keep parts of our old identity, not our old sinfulness, of course, about whether we're Australian, Sri Lankan, follow cricket or footy or whatever.

But our new identity in Christ supersedes our old divisions in life. We all share the same color of that. What is it?

Violet, purple, blue. I don't know what color it is on the screen. Our new identity in Christ supersedes our old divisions in life. And that brings us peace.

Because we're now all on the same side. We're all in Christ together. And so we are to live out that peace we already have in Christ.

Back in 2019, it was the 25th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, where in a hundred days, Hutus killed more than 800,000 Tutsis.

[13:31] I mentioned this back in 2019. One Hutu who took part in the killings was a man called Kalikste. You can see him on the screen. He and his wife, Marcella were neighbors and best friends with Andrew and Madrine.

But Madrine was a Tutsi and Andrew a Tutsi lover because he married her. And so Kalikste murdered Madrine's parents and her five siblings, killed them all.

Only Madrine escaped. Kalikste went to prison and Andrew hated him. Kalikste spent a lot of time in grief and remorse. He repented and became a Christian.

When he got out, he and Marcella found themselves one day at the same church service as Andrew and Madrine. And they heard about Christ who brings forgiveness with God and peace with each other.

And so after the service, they said, we've got to talk. And remembering their peace that they had because of united in Christ meant that Andrew practiced that peace in life by forgiving Kalikste.

[14:42] For their new identity in Christ was bigger than their old divisions in life, bigger than even their hurt. It enabled them to forgive and to enjoy the unity and peace they already have in Christ.

In fact, they can even hold hands as brothers instead of being filled with bitterness. Our church is full of people from many different backgrounds who wouldn't normally give two hoots about each other.

But instead, because we are united together in Christ, do now care for one another. This was Christ's purpose.

Verse 15. To bring us together as one new humanity and so bring horizontal peace between us. And verse 16.

In his one body to reconcile both of us to God through the cross by which he put to death the hostility.

[15:55] One of the most moving scenes coming out of Afghanistan the other week was that U.S. Air Force plane trying to take off from Kabul airport with people scrambling and clinging on.

Sadly, only those who got in the plane were saved from the Taliban. They had peace from the hostility created by the Taliban.

And by getting into that one plane, they were also united and had peace with each other. There was no hostility between those in the plane.

They didn't care if they were Afghan or American. What mattered was being in the plane. Christ is like the plane. He saves us from hostility created not by the Taliban, but by our sin, which brings vertical peace between us and God.

And he saves us from the hostility with others, which brings that horizontal peace with one another. Because again, what matters is not the old divisions of Jew and Gentile, but our new unity in the plane, in Christ.

[17:07] Christ. This was always God's plan. Right from week one, we saw in chapter one, verse 10, that God's plan was to unite all things in Christ.

We even heard in our Old Testament reading that God's plan was to heal and bring peace to those far and near. And that's what Paul picks up now on in verse 17.

Verse 17, He came and preached peace to you who are far away and peace to those who are near. For through Christ, we have both got access to the father by one spirit.

You see, Jesus brings peace. He is our peace. He brings that double peace, vertical peace with God, horizontal peace with one another. And so now we not only have access to God in prayer, but we're no longer distant outsiders and no hoppers.

Rather, we're close insiders and family members. Point three, verse 19. So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of God's household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

[18:32] Remember back in verse 12, before Christ, we were not citizens with Israel, but now in Christ, we are fellow citizens with Israel.

Before Christ, we're foreigners to God's promises. But now in Christ, we are family members. You see, without Christ, we're no hoppers, distant outsiders.

But in Christ, we are family members and close insiders. So close that God lives in us. Verse 21. In Christ, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

And in Christ, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives. by his spirit. We are God's temple because God lives in us by his spirit, working through our conscience and our minds.

You can't get any closer to God, this side of heaven, can you? God living in you. This is our privileged place in Christ.

[19:45] It's like we've gone from a relational rags to relational riches. I mean, most of you would have heard about the musical and movie called Annie. She was a orphan who had a hard knock life.

As one of the songs goes, she had no family, was excluded, kept far from society without real hope in life, because no one really wanted to adopt her.

But then she was adopted by Mr. Warbucks, the so-called God of New York. She was brought into his family with access to Mr. Warbucks, and she ends up calling him Daddy.

That's our spiritual journey. From rags to riches, from no hoppers and distant outsiders, to family members and close insiders, because of Christ.

And so by way of application, reap like Jeep. And nothing to do with the car Jeep, just to help you remember, reap with a double E. Reap like Jeep.

[20:52] So on your screens, remember, express, exercise, and pray. Remember who we once were, that we might continue to thank God for who we now are in Christ.

I know many of you are feeling this lockdown. We're not just feeling the restrictions and fatigue, but also the separation. We were made for relationships.

And not just with friends and family, but also church family. If you're not missing your church family face to face, then perhaps we need to work harder at getting to know one another.

But if you are feeling that separation, then use it for good. Every time you feel it, let it remind you that this is what we once were.

Separate. Excluded. Use it to help you remember that what you once were, so that you might continue to thank God for who we now are in Christ.

[21:57] In any terms, remember, remember, we were once relationally in rags, that you might thank God for making us relationally rich in Christ.

Remember. And second, express, express our unity in Christ. I realize this is hard to do at the moment. We cannot meet together to express our unity as family, family, but we can express it by

caring for one another as family.

Whether it's by phone calls or messages or cards or even treats. As someone in my Bible study group said last week, that Mark, Vijay, and I cannot do it all.

I wish I could, but I can't. I was actually hoping to have chocolates here today for Father's Day. But I can't tell you to leave your homes and come to church to collect them because the church office is not allowed to be open.

I don't want to encourage you to break the law. But more than that, I'm not supposed to do it all. A part of expressing our unity as family is that we're meant to all express it together, bit by bit.

[23 : 14] So can I encourage you this month, each week of this month, to make one extra phone call to see how one other person at church is going, to encourage them, to offer to pray for them.

One extra phone call each week this month. One extra call than you'd normally make. Even if that's zero calls to one call.

If you need numbers, email me. And can I say thank you to those who are already expressing our unity by doing these things. I was visiting someone last week who was still in pain due to surgery. So it was a legal pastoral visit, just to be clear. But they mentioned how lots of people had called them from church to see how they were going. It was so encouraging. I also know others who have dropped off plates and slices of food.

That's so brilliant. In fact, last week I had three surprises. Someone dropped off chocolates.

Another person arranged for a delivery of nuts. There was a lot more there in that box than there are now.

[24 : 21] We've eaten quite a few already. And another person from my other Bible student group actually arranged for some donuts to be delivered with a note that said, a bit of sunshine in lockdown. And there were fancy donuts at that.

And so we're all good. We're all good. But the point is, we can express our unity in Christ as family by caring and calling.

And when we're able to do so, by meeting together. So express our unity. Exercise our peace is the other E.

This is where Paul goes with the passage later on in the letter. He says that we're to make every effort to keep our unity by exercising our bond of peace.

How? Well, by patiently bearing with one another in love. At the moment, that means when we meet on Zoom and they've forgotten to unmute themselves yet again, you know, you don't harass them, but patiently bear with them.

[25 : 29] Or, if they express a political view that's different to us, we don't then try to mute them, but patiently bear with them. Or, if we're calling others, but they're not calling us, we don't get upset, but patiently bear with them.

Or for families, if people in your house are annoying you, because we're feeling all cooped up together, then patiently bear with them.

In fact, I heard about one family who, during the next school holidays, are actually going to go camping in their backyard just to get out of the four walls of the house. And it means when we can meet together after lockdown and someone does something to you or forgets your name or takes your seat, if you can remember where you used to sit, we don't get annoyed, but we patiently bear with them.

We're to make every effort to exercise the peace we have in Christ. Just like Andrew and Clixy in Rwanda. And lastly, we're to pray for world peace.

John Lennon wrote in his song, imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do, nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too. He saw that religion was the cause of conflict and hostility.

[27 : 00] And some religions are, but not Christ. He doesn't tell us to use violence, Christ tells us to show love.

And those who have done wrong in Christ's name were not following Jesus, they were following their sinful desires. which means it's really our sin and selfishness that causes hostility and conflict between both people and between God.

But because Christ's blood paid for our sin, he brings real peace. Both that horizontal peace with one another and that vertical peace with God. And so to pray for world peace really means to pray that Christ is proclaimed so that people might find true peace.

Last Wednesday night was our monthly prayer night via Zoom and we prayed for Afghanistan using some helpful prayer points from some mission agencies. But I realized afterwards we didn't actually pray that Christ would be proclaimed even in Afghanistan.

Yes, we should pray Christians will be protected there, but we should also pray that they might have opportunities to share Jesus with others because Jesus is our peace.

[28 : 27] Christ is our peace so let's reap like Jeep. Remember who we once were that we might thank God for who we now are in Christ.

Express our unity by caring and calling. One extra call each week this month. And exercise our peace by patiently bearing.

And finally, pray for world peace by praying Christ is proclaimed. Let's start praying that now. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you so much for the Lord Jesus.

We thank you that because he dealt with sin, he brings real peace. And so because of that, help us, we pray to reap like Jeep. To remember who we once were that we might continue to thank you for who we now are in Christ.

Fellow family members, close insiders. Help us to express our unity by caring and calling for one another. One extra call each week this month.

[29 : 40] And help us, we pray, to exercise our peace by patiently bearing with one another. And finally, help us, we pray, to be prayerful for places like Afghanistan and Myanmar.

Praying not just that you would protect your people in those places, but that Christ would be proclaimed even in those places. That people might come to know real peace.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.