

"War and Peace"

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Amen. Turn with me this morning to Colossians 1. We're talking this Christmas season about songs of a Savior.
- Man, we've sung some beautiful ones this morning, haven't we? Glorious songs tell us about Jesus. We started off this series talking about our longing for God to come and be with us.
- Last week we saw what it cost Him to do that. What Christmas cost Jesus for Him to sacrifice to be born and be with us for us.
- These next two Sundays, what we're going to talk about is the impact of the incarnation. What does the Bible tell us that Jesus accomplishes when the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us?
- [1 : 1 4] What does that do? And there are many ways to answer that question. Some are universal in their scope. They consider how Christmas brings hope and restoration to all of God's creation.
- And we'll look at that next week. Others are very personal. And they consider how Christmas brings hope to me and to you particularly and individually.
- That's today. We're going to think about that great hymn that we just sang that Charles Wesley wrote. Hark the herald angels sing. And especially the glorious phrase, God and sinners reconciled.
- Think about that from Colossians chapter 1. I've titled this sermon, War and Peace. You can only hope that title is a reference to the theme rather than the length of this sermon.
- That went better than I thought. Listen to another glorious Christ hymn of the early church to contemplate at Christmas.
- [2 : 3 1] Paul begins with a famous description of the identity of Jesus. And then tells us the results of the work of Jesus.
- Colossians 1 starting at verse 15. The Son, Jesus, is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn of all creation.
- For by Him all things were created in heaven and on earth. Visible and invisible. Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him.
- And He is before all things. And in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. That in everything He might be preeminent.
- For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And through Him to reconcile to Himself all things. Whether on earth or in heaven.
- [3 : 3 1] Making peace by the blood of His cross. And now the verses we're going to focus on this morning. What does all of that, this glorious God become man mean for us?

And you. You who once were alienated and hostile in mind. Doing evil deeds. He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death.

In order to present you holy. And blameless. And above reproach before Him. If indeed you continue in the faith. Stable and steadfast.

Not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard. Which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven. And of which I, Paul, became a minister. This is God's word for which we give Him thanks.

Let's pray. God, we do give you thanks. In particular for these truths of your word.

[4 : 37] Truths too glorious for us to comprehend. Amen. We can't wrap our minds or hearts around them, Father. But would you this morning pull back the curtain just a little bit.

That we would see you. That we would know you. We would trust you. That we would worship you. Work in us as you love to do.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. There are some people who are such arch enemies.

That you wouldn't even believe me this morning if I told you that they were friends. I mean we laugh about some of you whose marriages involve both an Auburn and an Alabama grad.

And how y'all pull that off together. But can you imagine if the Auburn and Alabama football teams sat down for breakfast the morning of the Iron Bowl.

[5 : 37] You know just to engage in some friendly chatting. You know. How you doing? So good to see you. Hope you have a great day. Can you imagine them being there in the same room? No.

There would be this huge food fight. At a minimum would break out. You wouldn't believe me if I told you that this afternoon Nancy Pelosi was holding a press conference.

Where she would declare Donald Trump the greatest president ever. And make a large donation to his re-election campaign. You don't believe that. Kids.

It is seriously not possible that Peter Pan and Captain Hook would be friends. Right? That they would work together to improve the way Neverland works.

They are going to team up for that. Right? No. That is impossible. They are always out to get each other. That is who they are. They are enemies. If you heard today that Israel and Hamas had reached a peace agreement.

[6 : 40] You would roll your eyes and say. We will see how long that lasts. They have been fighting over there for centuries. There is no way that peace is going to last.

Right? Now I want you to think of one more thing that way. God and sinners reconciled.

I know you have been singing that in this wonderful Christmas carol that is happy and sweet. Maybe years and years for many of you. I am not trying to mess it up.

But I do want you to stop and think about it. This goes way beyond any of those other arch enemies. Doesn't it? Peace between those two.

Between God and sinners. Should be even more ridiculously unbelievable. No way. When the holy, holy, holy God encounters sinners who by definition are not, not, not holy.

[7 : 50] Bad things happen. Not good things. You can look in both the Old Testament and the New Testament and find stories of sinful men and women who disobey God and dishonor his name.

And they're immediately consumed. You don't waltz into God's holy presence and come out alive. Do you? That's why they tied the rope to the ankle of the high priest when he entered the Holy of Holies once a year just in case.

No one else was going in after him. It's our problem, isn't it? God dwells in unapproachable light.

Only someone with clean hands and a pure heart can approach his holy dwelling. And we've been playing in the mud in every sense of the word.

So it is utterly shocking when the herald angels come and proclaim glory to God in the highest and on earth what?

[8 : 59] Peace. Peace. Peace among those with whom he is pleased. They say fear not. Peace on earth.

Peace between God and men on whom the favor of God rests. When you hear that, you ought to sit up and listen. Not just because angels are talking to shepherds, which is really pretty cool.

But because of what they're saying. They're declaring a path to peace in the most horrific, longest lasting war in the history of the universe.

Peace on earth and mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled. What? No way. This is remarkable.

That's what Paul is marveling about in Colossians. He starts by warming us up for next week and talking about this Jesus who is fully God in every way.

[10 : 05] Who's the perfect image of God. The one who holds all things together. He's coming to reconcile all things to God. Verse 20 says. But that's next week.

Then he says. And you. I don't want you to miss the personal impact of Jesus and Christmas.

I want you to know particularly how this applies to you, Southwood. And you. Who once were alienated and hostile in mind.

Doing evil deeds. Y'all this is the horror of war. Between sinners and God.

It's no occasional disagreement. It's no small skirmish. It is a persistent all-out battle between enemies beyond any other set of enemies that we know.

[11 : 08] See, sin is sin because God is God. Sin is fundamentally rebellion against his inherent goodness.

Seeking to rule in place of the king. Not only does God not sin. But sin is sin because God doesn't do it.

Does that make sense? That God and sin don't go together. That's where it comes from. That sin even is what it is. Listen one more time to the status terms for our relationship with God before Jesus.

Paul particularly is referring to Gentiles in his day. But this is true for all of us. Many of us Gentiles. All of us born in sin.

He says we are alienated from God. Have you ever felt distant from God?

[12 : 10] Like your relationship with him was cold? Unfamiliar? Less than intimate? The word here is not describing a feeling of distance.

But rather a state or condition. Alienated. That's the way it is. Separated from God. Having broken relationship with him.

That's not merely a passive state that we find ourselves in. But Paul adds we are actively hostile in our minds. That is setting ourselves up against God.

Warring against him. In other places we're told enemies of God. We are in that state set against God.

Not loving him and wanting his glory. Submitting to his great kingship and control over everything. But rather hating him.

[13 : 17] Wanting our own glory. Grasping control for ourselves. Now maybe you don't remember feeling that way.

But Paul says that's how we are born. With sinful, fallen hearts and minds that are selfish. That resist God even when we're not aware of it.

And it's that condition of our hearts. That warring state of our minds against God. That leads to all of our evil deeds. We don't become sinners because we sin.

Rather we sin doing evil deeds because we are sinners. Hostile in mind towards God. Because our hearts and our minds are set against God.

We then pursue all sorts of idolatries. Of immoralities. In our lives. And what those things do is they only display the brokenness in our relationship with our creator and king.

[14 : 26] Right? We see it every day. In each of our lives. On the news. It really is worse than Auburn and Alabama.

Because we're born into this warring race of humanity. And we can't fix our situation. By nature. By choice.

By action. We fight against God. And are estranged from him. It's the horror of that war that we must appreciate this morning.

We've got to realize the reality of that. And admit that that's true. Before we can truly rejoice in the peace that God brings.

God and sinners reconciled won't be marvelous to us. Until we realize it is essentially a contradiction in terms. It's a paradox.

[15 : 25] An impossibility. Alienated. Hostile. And evil. Do not go with reconciled. Except here.

In the very next verse. Paul paints a different picture. Of our relationship with God. And you.

Who were once all of those horrible things. Caught up in that horrible war against God. And he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death.

In order to present you holy. And blameless. And above reproach. Before him. Reconciled. Restored. Brought back into right relationship with God.

Who now promises. Not to destroy you. To tolerate. And ignore you for the rest of your life. To keep you at arm's length.

[16 : 27] To keep you at arm's length. And have nothing to do with the rest of your life. So you can enjoy whatever you'd like. No. It's so much better than that. Because God didn't create your relationship to be like that.

He created you to live in intimate relationship with him. To be loved and delighted in. By him. And to live for his glory in everything that you do.

So what God actually says. Is you go from being alienated from me. To being holy. Set apart for me.

In a special relationship with the God of the universe. No longer far off. But now brought near to him. You're no longer enemies of God.

Set against him in every possible way. But rather blameless. Not at fault for any of it. Completely forgiven for any wrong thoughts or attitudes.

[17 : 30] For all your lustful desires. For that discontented spirit. Forgiven and standing before the perfect God. The righteous judge.

Innocent. And then he says. No longer evil. But above reproach.

And you thought Satan had a list of charges to bring against you. Plenty of mistakes. You've made. Books worth of accusations. And he's going to fling them at you.

And in God's courtroom. Satan is entirely muzzled. The charges don't stick. The accusations are not held against you. You stand completely accepted.

Fully exonerated. Entirely at peace with God. Your former enemy. Isn't that amazing? Can you believe that that could be true? Christian God looks at you today.

[18 : 32] Not with contempt. Not with impatience. But with delight. He's not out to get you. He's out to sing over you.

He's not disappointed in you. He's delighted in you. Regardless of your life situation that may not be what you want.

Regardless of your job performance. Which may leave you feeling down on yourself. Regardless of your being the worst parent ever.

Again. Again. He loves you. And delights in you. Last week we celebrated that at this table.

Didn't we? We pulled up a seat as it were. And ate with God. God and sinners reconciled. Sharing fellowship.

[19 : 28] Reminding ourselves of his love for us. Brothers and sisters. Listen to me. That is indeed how he feels about you.

That he delights to eat with you. And if you've thought at all. About what you deserve. That should absolutely amaze you.

Startle you. Make you struggle to believe that it's actually true. And some of you have come and met with me and said. That's my struggle. I genuinely don't believe that that could possibly be true.

It's too good to be true. And I've said listen. I think you may be the first ones who are getting it. You may be understanding it better than the rest of us. That it could even be possible.

That this war that we've been engaged with is now over. You were born fighting it. You know how impossible peace must be. But it is true. The angels came and declared it.

[20 : 29] He had to send them so we might believe. Paul is reiterating and explaining what it means. And we've been singing about it this morning. It is true. At peace with God.

How in the world? How? We should be asking. How could that be true for me, pastor? Sounds great.

But snap my fingers. Work real hard. No, no, no. The path to peace like that must be truly amazing.

Right? That's the whole point this morning. That God would have us realize and rejoice in. Is that it is no small thing to reconcile God and sinners.

Let's not make it one. It's no quick makeover to turn alienated, hostile, evildoers into holy, blameless, and above reproach sons and daughters of God.

[21 : 31] It is no minor announcement, whether angels make it or anyone else, to say peace on earth. Good will to men with whom God is pleased, on whom his favor rests.

In fact, as we've seen, it is something that no mere man can accomplish. The men on whom his favor rests are not men who've earned his favor.

The angel's announcement can't be read that way. It should actually be heard as peace to men whom God has graced. Upon whom God has poured his blessing.

God is the one who achieves and declares peace. Which is good news. Because see, if it's his work, his initiative. Then it doesn't matter how far off you are.

How messed up you are. How hopelessly discouraged you are. God is coming with his grace to declare peace with you.

[22 : 39] Amen. Praise the Lord, right? God comes with grace to declare peace. In Colossians, we read Jesus makes peace by the blood of his cross.

God has now reconciled you, how? By the death of Jesus, God in flesh. How in the world will this seemingly impossible, unimaginable peace be achieved?

Through a child who grows up. The prince of peace, Isaiah says. To us, a child is born.

The heaven-born prince of peace. That's why we sing, hail the heaven-born prince of peace. It's not just happy words for Christmas.

Glory to the newborn king because it can't go anywhere else. Because he accomplishes this incredible reconciliation between sworn enemies.

[23 : 51] That's the good news of Christmas, y'all. The child will bring peace. Peace. God has written one of the most beautiful pictures of this reality in a tribe in a remote portion of Indonesia.

The Savi people had several different tribes. They'd been largely untouched by the rest of civilization. Until Don and Carol Richardson moved in to live among them in the 1960s.

The Savi culture was one built on treachery. And violence. Vengeance. Those were their values. They were praised among the Savi people.

As a result, the tribes were locked in constant warfare. One killing avenged another killing. Every offer of peace was actually a trick so that there could be more violence and bloodshed.

And the Richardson showed up with some very valuable medicine. And so they became treasured by the Savi people. But even as they labored to learn the language, understand the culture, they eventually saw their presence was only increasing the violence.

[25 : 06] It was another thing for the tribes to fight for. They warred over the medicine. After trying everything that he knew to bring peace, Don concluded they were going to have to leave altogether.

So he gathered the tribal leaders and told them of his decision. And they pleaded with him to stay and assured him, We'll make peace. There will be peace between the tribes soon, they said.

Don records in his book, Peace Child, what happened the next morning when the warring tribes gathered outside opposite each other.

He tells a man named Kayo from one of the tribes. He writes this, Kayo's heart was pounding as he slipped away from his wife, Wumi, and slipped up the stair pole into his home.

There were two other men with many children who had started but failed to go through with this bold act, buckling under emotional pressure from themselves or their wives.

[26 : 11] And Kayo had only one child, six-month-old Biakadon, lying there on the grass mat, looking up at his father, smiling in recognition.

But with his heart wrenching, Kayo reached down and picked up Biakadon. Alone in the empty longhouse, he held the soft, warm, gurgling body of his son close to his chest one last time.

He thought of the grief his deed would bring to Wumi, but there was no other way. Kayo walked outside, his limbs trembling, his visage contorted by the conflicting emotions raging within him.

Then his wife, Wumi, saw him running toward the other tribe with Biakadon in his arms. At first she stood frozen with shock and disbelief. Then she screamed and ran after Kayo, pleading with all the force of her soul, Biakadon, my son, my son, she cried.

But Kayo never looked back. Kayo placed his son in the arms of one of the other tribe's leaders. And then this emotional scene was reenacted as a man from that tribe brought a son to place in Kayo's arms.

[27 : 29] And Richardson, not understanding, grabbed a young man and said, what's going on? What am I watching? And he said this, Kayo has given his son to the other tribe as a teroptim, a peace child.

And Mahain, in return, has given a teroptim to us. Why? Why is it necessary? Richardson asked. You've been urging us to make peace, he said.

Don't you know it's impossible to have peace without a peace child? Richardson learned that a centuries-old tribal practice was this teroptim, peace child.

It was the only thing that brought peace in a culture of treachery and vengeance where you never trusted the other tribe. As long as the child given to their enemies lived, the tribe would leave their enemies alone.

How'd that work? Richardson eventually discovered this was the only way peace was made between such committed enemies because it was the only action that could always be trusted.

[28 : 39] If a man would actually give his own son to his enemies, that man could be trusted. That and that alone was a proof of goodwill no shadow of cynicism could discredit.

Dear friends, the message of Christmas is that a peace child has been given to us to bring peace in the greatest war.

The one between God and sinners. Because of Jesus, we have peace with God who ran toward us with his son in his arms and gave him to us to achieve peace with his enemies.

If a man would actually give his own son to his enemies, that man could be trusted. Do you need that reminder this Christmas?

That you can trust God who if he gave his only son for you, how will he not also along with him graciously give you all things?

[30 : 02] Are you still hostile towards God? You see maybe for the first time that the only way you can be reconciled to him, the one who made you and loves you, is through that baby in a manger who would grow up and become a man and give his life for you?

Have you always been cynical? Particularly about trusting God? Hesitant to believe that there's actually love like that that is sure and eternal and you could count on because others have promised and burned you and God shows his love to us, his good will to man in sending his son not just to live among us but ultimately to die in our place.

Jesus has turned the Father's anger from us and earned us the smile of a heavenly Father now and forever. all of this that he's done for you so that he can be at peace with you.

He did that. Won't you trust him? Won't you find hope and rest in him this Christmas?

Jesus is the peace child, the prince of peace, the only one who reconciles sinners to God, self-righteous sinners, self-loathing sinners.

[31 : 47] Jesus reconciles us to God. Glory to the newborn king. Peace on earth and mercy mild.

God and sinners reconciled. Let's pray. Jesus we bow and worship you you alone could have offered us any hope.

The only one who could bring enemies of God like us back into his family. Who could seat us at his table. We couldn't do it.

Many of us have tried. We've gone to church a long time. We've done lots of stuff we were supposed to do and not ever given up to trust Jesus.

Some of us have just run the other way and not wanted anything to do with you and you have chased us down this morning to bring us home. Jesus thank you for loving us.

[33 : 01] May we know what it means to be reconciled to our God. To know him and to trust him and to see him care for us, delight in us and love us.

Teach that to our hearts. Give us joy in Jesus. In his name we ask. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Will human visit First Seniorlaim■■ last time to next foot and take another temporary effort to live in Pickei with the Big■ housing wash His name has a take