

The Sure Way to Peace

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[0 : 0 0] This morning, a relevant passage for the occasion, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 14, and we'll read down to chapter 6 and the first two verses.

For Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.

So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view, though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.

[1 : 0 9] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We, therefore, are Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.

We implore you, on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As God's fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain, for he says, in the time of my favor, I heard you, and in the day of salvation, I helped you.

Amen. God give us good understanding. We are to strive to convince people that the gospel is the answer to the world's problems.

[2 : 3 9] A key gospel word is one that occurs a number of times in our passage, and it is the word reconciliation.

Reestablishing a broken friendship. Turning an enemy into a friend. I was pastor in a church in Northern Ireland for a few years in Bangor.

And at a pastor's conference that was held in Dublin during the Troubles, which were at that peak when I was there, I met a young pastor who served in the south of Ireland.

And he was a former member of the IRA, but he trusted Christ, and he turned away from sectarianism and violence.

Bless him, both of his hands had been blown off. As he was planting a bomb for the IRA, it exploded prematurely.

[3 : 5 5] Another pastor at the same conference, once a member of the other camp, the loyalist group, had been led by Christ, led to Christ, by a prison visitor.

Christ, he was serving a life sentence at the time of 10 years for murder. He committed a murder in revenge for the murder of his own family.

And on his release, serving those 10 years, he enlisted at the Irish Baptist College for the ministry. Led to Christ during his incarceration.

And I witnessed those two men, one formerly IRA, the other a loyalist, and they embraced.

They embraced in brotherly love, and to me that was a very moving moment. Who else could do that but the Lord Jesus? That was reconciliation, and it was beautiful to witness.

[5 : 16] Bringing reconciliation to an impossible situation. My wife and I visited Coventry Cathedral a couple of years ago, and you know that during World War II, Coventry was blitzed with Nazi bombs.

One night, more than 600 people were killed in that one raid. The cathedral in Coventry was destroyed. And half the city was left in ruins.

And the permanent themes of the new cathedral, which is a very interesting place to visit, are reconciliation and forgiveness. In Coventry, of all places.

And in the cathedral, if you've been there, in Coventry, there is a bronze of two enemies embracing in reconciliation.

As Graham said, I was born just before World War II was declared.

[6 : 20] I was just six months old when my father voluntarily enlisted as a soldier to serve in the Middle East. And, yeah, I didn't see...

I saw him once in the seven years when my brother was killed in 1942. He was allowed... compassionately, but I don't remember much about that.

46 was the next time I saw him. My childhood memories. As I lived through the war... As a young child, yes, but it was a... Devastation, bombs, air raids, barrage balloons, shortages of everything.

And I was always hungry because there's never enough food. Psalm 2 and verse 1 asks a question. We still ask it. Why do the nations rage?

Why so much war? Jesus predicted in Matthew 24 and verse 7, Nations shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and you'll hear of wars and rumors of wars.

[7 : 26] And human history is peppered with a myriad named wars. 2016, this very year, conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan.

What is the root of all this? What is the root of wars? Well, let me tell you that the Bible speaks of a world war in which all nations are united against a common enemy.

And that enemy is God. 1 John 5, 19 says, The whole world is under the control of the evil one, the enemy of God.

Humanity is at war with its creator. Romans 8, verse 7, The natural mind governed by human nature is inherently hostile to God.

It does not submit to God's laws, nor can it. Those of human nature cannot please God. God and people are estranged, alienated.

[8 : 42] And we are the aggressors, not God. Psalm 2, in verse 2 says, The nations conspire. The rulers of the earth band together against the Lord and his Christ, saying, Let's break off their chains.

Let's throw off their shackles. That's the view the world has about God. Let's get rid of him. Psalm 14 speaks of people who deliberately choose to deny God's very existence.

But God regards that unbelief as hostility towards him and disobedience. Because they are denying in their hearts what they know to be true.

Willingly suppressing the truth, they are without excuse. Psalm 14 goes on, Whoever says in his heart there is no God is a fool.

And the Lord looks down from heaven to see if there are any who understand and seek after him. All have turned away and become corrupt.

[9 : 57] They never call on the Lord. On another occasion, God looked down, as he did in Psalm 14, long ago. God looked down and saw how great human wickedness had become in the earth.

He saw that every inclination of the thoughts of human hearts was only evil all the time. That's what God saw. This was so grievous to God, he decided, the human race I have created, I will wipe off the face of the earth.

All people have become corrupt. You're not an exception this morning. Question, then, is there any hope of reconciliation between man and his maker?

If we desire to be on the right terms with God, he tells us where to begin. He dictates the terms, he's got every right to.

Acts 17:30, he commands unconditional surrender. These are the terms. He commands all people everywhere in every generation to change their thinking.

[11 : 19] He has set a day when he will judge the whole world with justice by the man he has appointed, Christ Jesus, and has given proof that he'll do this by raising him from the dead.

In the face of this universal human alienation, God has taken the initiative for which we should be eternally grateful.

Isaiah 1, 18, this is God speaking, come now, let's settle this matter, let's address this matter. Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though red like crimson, they shall be like wool. You see, it's sin that separates from God. Sin caused alienation and God desires reconciliation.

Our confident and constant message to the world is God in grace has provided a mediator. 1 Timothy 2 and verse 5, there is one mediator between God and man, the man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

[12 : 40] He came into the world to be the friend of sinners, the friend of God's enemies. 1 Peter 3, 18, Christ suffered as he did at Calvary, Christ suffered once for your sins, the righteous for the unrighteous.

To what purpose? In order to bring you back to God. 2 Corinthians 5, 19, we've just read it. God himself was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting people's sins against them.

dear friends, there's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. 2 Corinthians 5, verse 16, explains the root of the problem.

we once regarded Christ from a worldly point of view.

We do so no longer. He died for sinners that sinners should no longer live for themselves but live for him who died for them and rose again from the dead.

[13 : 59] Now let's put this question to you this morning. what do you think of Christ? What does he really mean to you? We once regarded Christ from a worldly point of view.

We do so no longer. They were Christians. In other words, your estimate of Jesus at the moment, I don't know all of you, could be wrong.

Saul of Tarsus made a judgment about Christ, you remember. He dismissed him as a fraud and so persecuted Jesus, followers as much as he could with a passionate hatred and people today still misjudge Jesus Christ.

How do you currently regard him? The world's evaluation of him is wrong. They've got it wrong about Jesus. Saul admits to his former mistakes. He says in 1 Timothy 1, I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor, arrogant and violent.

I was the worst of sinners. Out of ignorance I acted in unbelief. That's his testimony. Well, why so much war?

[15 : 24] Because of the human heart. Saul of Tarsus was changed. On his way to persecute more Christians on the Damascus road was changed.

God commands all men everywhere to change their thinking. God commands all men everywhere to repent. That's another way of putting it. Saul of Tarsus saw Christ in a new and true light and confessed humbly later on in Galatians 1.16.

It pleased God to reveal his Son in me. He was given a divine revelation. His eyes were opened and he was never the same again.

He was a new creation. No more in condemnation. Isaiah 53 verse 2 speaks prophetically of the various opinions people would have of Christ when finally he would come into the world.

They would ignore him, despise him, reject him, accord him no esteem or respect.

[16 : 43] They would judge him to be a blasphemer, a troublemaker, a deceiver. And all these were their human judgments.

Saul of Tarsus as he once was hated Jesus and his followers. His goal was to rid the world of Christians, much of what's going on in Aleppo just now.

ISIS wanted to rid the world of Christians. Saul of Tarsus wanted to do exactly the same. He was at war with them.

Glad that dead Jesus had been crucified, deservedly removed forever as he saw it. He consented and gave his vote to the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen.

He was right behind it. Jesus cared and cares how people think about him.

[17 : 55] I know that because he said to his disciples, who do people say that I am? I could ask who do people say Donald Trump is?

and it wouldn't make a scrap of difference. Who do people say Tom Lawson is? It doesn't make any difference.

But what you think about Christ, if you trust him and believe him, your life will be transformed. You'll be absolutely changed.

What do you think of Christ whose son is he? That was a question he put. How important is that question? What do you think of Christ?

It's this important. Your whole eternal future depends upon it. Could that, could it be any more important than that? What do you think of Christ?

[18 : 57] Because when you die and go before God in judgment, he's going to say, what did you make of my son? And we want to change your mind before that happens.

Some replied, oh, he's the son of David, descendant of David. And according to human descent, he was. But then the conundrum, King David calls the coming Jesus Lord.

Lord. Then if David calls Jesus Lord, how then can Jesus be David's son? If Jesus is not the son of God, folks, he's a liar.

He's self-deluded. He's a megalomaniac, far more than Donald Trump. Jesus claims are wild and ridiculous if he isn't who he claims to be.

And such a fraud would nullify whatever good things can be said about him. If I were to ask you, how do you regard Christ honestly?

[20 : 17] The Christian preacher strives for a change of mind in all his hearers. Paul spoke of his past when he'd become a Christian and he said, I was a blasphemer.

To deny Jesus Christ is the son of God, to deny that he's the son of God is blasphemy. Saul didn't recognize that Jesus was God in human flesh to begin with.

His view of Christ was revised. In verse 16, we thought of Jesus in a human way, in a certain way that didn't reckon too much importance to him, but there was a no longer in his attitude to his previous valuation.

He'd been woefully wrong about Jesus and now he was convinced he was the object of Christ's love. He saw Christ's death as having personal relevance for him.

Jesus died the innocent for the guilty to establish peace with God, even for callous, cruel Saul of Tarsus to reconcile him to God. And on the Damascus road, bent on murderous violence against the church, events took that dramatic turn.

[21 : 41] In grace, Jesus Christ took the initiative and halted Saul of Tarsus in his tracks and this vengeful, proud, extremist, religious fanatic, Saul of Tarsus, became a Christian.

To discover someone loves you whom you've long hated is a powerful incentive to revise your opinion about that person, to realize that your enemy desires to be your friend, willing to forgive all the harm you've done to him, wanting to do you good.

And Saul of Tarsus accepted that love of Christ that he suffered and laid down his life for him. And more than that, this same Jesus actively sought Saul out.

Why do you persecute me, Saul? and then his confession was, he loved me, and he gave himself for me.

And so he was changed. He wrote, God did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us. God so loved and God so gave.

[23 : 07] From that point on, love became the controlling factor in Paul's life. Not hate, the love of Christ propelled him, compelled him, motivated him, as we read in the first verse of our reading.

I had a Christmas broadcast a while ago by Clive James, and he was giving a ten-minute thing that you get before nine o'clock on a Sunday morning, Radio 4, and he gave this magnificent account of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a good man he was and how much good he'd done for the world. And I thought, good on you, Clive. But as he came to the end, Jesus, however good he was, in his eyes, was not the Son of God.

No, wouldn't go that far. Wouldn't go that far. That's just being too that's going too far.

And I wanted to say to Clive James when I saw him in George Street having a cup of coffee during the festival, I wanted to go up to him and say, Clive, he's more than just a man.

[24 : 24] He's more than that. He's more than just a goody goody. I didn't have the courage to do it. But he's not a Christian, and he still says he's not a Christian and he's dying, as you may know.

Now, this morning, do you have kind, complimentary thoughts about Jesus? You think he's really nice. I remember something I heard at the chapel.

The queen called, my sister lives near Sandringham, and I can just picture this. There's a little shop near Sandringham, and the queen walked into this shop with her head square on.

An elderly woman wearing a headscarf, and already in the shop was another woman. And she looked at the queen and said, you look remarkably like the queen.

She said, I find that very reassuring. And I just suppose that person, if the queen had announced herself, I really am the queen.

[25 : 37] And then she said, rubbish. I don't believe you're a nice, sweet old lady, but the queen, pull the other leg.

Yeah? It's not enough to pay compliments to Jesus Christ. You've got to bow down before him and say with Thomas, my lord and my god.

That's what Jesus is. Not just a sweet man who did a lot of good for the world. To say that the queen is a sweet old lady is faint praise for a monarch.

monarch. Well, have you regarded Jesus Christ, not with hatred, but perhaps with nice religious thoughts? But it's not enough.

The woman of Samaria didn't know who she was talking to. She was expecting the Messiah and Jesus turned around to her and said, good lady, I'm the Messiah.

[26 : 39] I'm the Messiah. Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth was not a deluded, dangerous, messianic pretender.

He was the son of God. But you know, something else happened to Saul of Tarsus, which I think is very wonderful. He admitted he'd been wrong and there was a deeper change in that man immediately and it's worth observing all hatred, all violence, all bitterness were instantly taken out of his heart.

Like those two pastors that I began talking about. That bitterness was taken out of their hearts and they were able to embrace one another. God was so with Saul of Tarsus, he became a man full of love.

The Holy Spirit poured the love of God into his heart and he came to know the peace of God and the love of God and he went on this once evil man went on to write more than half of the New Testament.

How's that for grace? And as you look over history and the wars that have taken place in the world, suppose Kaiser Bill and Adolf Hitler and Mussolini and Joe Stalin and Idi Amin and Colonel Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein and Mao Tse Tung had a confrontation with Jesus Christ like Saul of Tarsus.

[28 : 28] What a different world. We'd be living in. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and he changes hearts and takes these things out of the human.

How North Korea need Kim Jong-un to have a confrontation with Jesus Christ where so many Christians Mugabe and Zimbabwe needs to know the Lord Jesus and change.

for soldiers who gave their lives in World War II we express our gratitude today. Of course when they died many of them they neither knew my name nor yours.

They were unaware of our existence and what the future would hold. In contrast just a bit of a testimony here I hear Jesus say Tom Lawson when facing vicious hostility and injury and insult I had you personally in mind in the agony of Gethsemane when I gave my back to be scourged when the nails were hammered through my hands and my feet when the crown of thorns was dug into my head when on the cross I was finally forsaken by my father and I became sin for you I had your name in my heart when I surrendered my life and died I was thinking of you.

That knowledge still reduces me to tears chosen in him before the foundation of the world.

[30 : 27] Wonderful. Something I don't want to forget. Lest we forget don't forget what the Lord Jesus has done and we'll be doing that in the communion service in a little while.

My body was given for you. My blood was shed for you. Never forget that. Even while we were sinners Christ died for us.

Christ didn't die for his friends. He died for his enemies to make them his friends. Duty and love of country are noble motives for men and women to enter military service.

My father wasn't press ganged. I get a bit worried that he went off to war as soon as I was born. I don't know whether I had anything to do with that but he volunteered.

He was a coal miner. He didn't need to volunteer. Coal miners were exempt. But he went. He volunteered like others who surrendered their freedom for our freedom.

[31 : 38] But we have to say they didn't precisely have you and me in mind, most of them. Listen to these words from the Lord.

Isaiah 49, verse 16. I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. My soul was on his heart. Christ died for those who despised him.

He died even while we were sinners and enemies in our mind. Now I am a debtor to mercy alone.

My name from the palms of his hands eternity will not erase. In marks of indelible grace on his heart remains.

The good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep knows them by name. Now is he calling you by name this morning?

[32 : 52] Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? My confession was as real as that. He called me by name. And I responded.

How can you respond to such grace? for let Isaiah tell you. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near.

Let the wicked forsake his way, the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and the Lord will have mercy on him, and our God will freely pardon.

In other words, while the opportunity is there, now is the accepted time. If you're saying, you haven't done it already, tomorrow will do, that is not acceptable to God.

If the Lord is speaking to you, now is the acceptable time. Jesus said, whoever comes to me, I will not turn him away.

[34 : 06] The document suspending world one hostilities, establishing freedom and peace, was signed 98 years ago.

I was married on the 11th of November, so it's difficult to forget, because it's remembrance day. this document was signed at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month, an armistice.

Agreement of opposing factions to cease hostilities of infinitely greater importance, was something that was signed 2,000 years ago, when Christ made peace for sinners through the blood of his cross.

Praise God. Hallelujah. Isn't that good news? Paul said, God was pleased through Christ to reconcile all things on earth and in heaven, to make peace by the blood of his cross.

Once alienated from God, enemies in your mind by your evil behavior, he is now reconciled by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation.

[35 : 39] I'm finished folks, but just to say this, the God of peace never causes wars. Quite the opposite.

he causes wars to cease. The Bible says so. Under his gracious influence, enemies will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and man shall study war no more.

Let me encourage you, that day is coming. When will it come? when every knee bows to Jesus Christ. And it will be peace forever for those who are in Christ, who are new creations.

The Lord speak to you this morning. We're going to sing a verse and then we're going to share communion together and remember how much we owe the Lord that one verse only, veiled in humanness, nailed upon a tree.

We'll sing it together. Amen.