

Advent 2021: Peace – Ephesians 2:11-22

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Preacher: Seth Harvey

[0:00] Good morning. Peace be with you. I'd like to say thank you to Pastor Nathan and the elders for having me here this morning. It's my pleasure and honor to be here with you guys.

! Today's sermon text will be from Ephesians chapter 2, Ephesians chapter 2, 11 through 22. Ephesians chapter 2, 11 through 22.

Ephesians chapter 2, Paul here is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the church at Ephesus and therefore his words are trustworthy and true and so we can build our lives, our families, our churches on them.

Ephesians 2, 11 through 22. Therefore, remember that at one time, you Gentiles in the flesh called by the uncircumcision, by what is called the circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands, remember that you are at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in the place of two.

[1:34] So making peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body to the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who are far off and peace to those who are near.

For through him, we both have access in one spirit to the father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but your fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. In whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit.

This is the word of the Lord. We human beings, we image bearers are forgetful creatures. We forget things like names and places and birthdays.

We forget things like mathematic formulas to phone numbers. We even sometimes forget what we had for breakfast the previous morning. Why are we image bearers so forgetful?

[2:49] We can offer a number of reasons, but as Christians gathered here this morning, we know that this is no neutral question. It's no morally neutral question to ask. Why are we so forgetful?

There's a number of reasons we could say. But we know as Christians that it's not a mere biological answer, nor a mere environmental answer to our forgetfulness.

Forgetfulness, rather, is an echo of sin. Forgetfulness is an echo of the fall. And here's what's so sad about our forgetfulness. It's not just contained to names and numbers and birthdays and formulas.

Forgetfulness is so sad because we are even prone to forget the greatest, most glorious, and rich in mercy truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Spurgeon, in a sermon from Galatians, paraphrased Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians.

And Spurgeon says something along the lines of, preach the gospel every week because we forget the gospel every week. Well, I'm going to read you what Luther actually said. Spurgeon was known to elaborate on some things.

[4:00] Here's what Luther wrote. Thus, it is an urgent necessity that the preaching of the gospel continue among us. Why, Luther writes, that we may hear and retain it.

Otherwise, we would soon forget our Lord. In our fallenness, we are prone to forget the source of true peace.

We forget that peace, and I'm using that as a proper noun, as a person. We forget that peace is by God's grace alone. And instead, the natural bit of our hearts is to believe that we earn and pursue peace through our own efforts and righteous merit.

We forget that peace is by God's grace. Instead, we believe that peace is earned through our efforts. We forget that peace is through Christ's cross. And instead, we deeply, deeply doubt this morning that peace is really ours through the cross.

We forget that peace dwells and walks among His people by His Spirit. So instead, we withdraw into isolation, resisting the deep and meaningful relationships of God's people of the local church.

[5:08] We forget the true source of peace. In earlier sections in Ephesians, Paul does this time travel thing.

He takes us into the past, and he brings us into the present. In chapter 1, he takes you into eternity past, before the foundations of the world. And he brings you into the presence with the obtained inheritance and the power of the Spirit.

In chapter 2, he takes you into the past by saying you were dead in your trespasses and sin in which you once walked. But now you've experienced the rich mercy of Christ Jesus. You've been raised up with Christ.

You've been made alive with Christ. You've been seated with Christ. That time travel he brings back here in chapter 2, 11 through 22.

And Paul takes the Ephesian readers on a journey through time in order to remind them of the immeasurable greatness of God's power, 119.

[6:09] And the richness of God's mercy in chapter 2, verse 4. In Christ toward those who believe. Namely, what does he want them to see? He wants them to see that Christ made peace.

That Christ made peace by reconciling the Ephesians to God and one another through his cross. And I think verse 14 sums up everything that Paul wants to say here.

And everything that I hope to say here as well. In 14, Paul writes, For he himself, for he himself is our peace.

We, the body of Christ in this place, We need Paul's exhortation to remember. Our forgetful hearts are longing for peace today.

And yet Advent reminds us that peace isn't just some immaterial feeling. It's always slipping through our fingers. Advent reminds us that peace is a person who dwells among his people by the Spirit.

[7:18] The Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. And if you have Christ today by faith, you have the objective reality of peace. You have peace himself. And our forgetful hearts need that this morning.

We need to be reminded of that. We need to remember that Christ Jesus himself is our peace. The first step that I want to take to explain this, to explore this, is in verses 11 through 13.

And I want you to remember that we were brought near to peace himself by grace alone. We were brought near to peace himself by grace alone. Later in verse 11, you see those first two words, Therefore remember, and these two words set the stage for what follows.

So on the basis of God's immeasurable power, on the basis of God's rich mercy in Christ, Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers, particularly the Gentile saints, to remember.

To remember what? At one time, they were separated from Christ. This is the summation of their predicament. They are separated from Christ.

[8:27] And in chapter 4, 17 through 20, Paul explains what it is to be a Gentile. He defines it for us. I'm not going to read that, but I'm going to just leave it at this. That fundamentally, Gentiles are those living in the dark, without God's gracious revelation of himself from his word.

The Gentiles were fundamentally dark to the holy scriptures. And so apart from God's gracious revelation of himself, the Gentiles, their greatest problem was alienation from Christ.

They were separated from Christ, separated from the prince of peace. And here's what we understand about God's word. Because Christ is the one to whom God's word points, because Christ is the embodiment of God's word, then in the darkness of the sin and unbelief, the Gentiles were ultimately separated, not merely from God's word writ, but from Christ himself.

Therefore, they are also alienated from the body of Christ and the promises of redemption.

They were strangers to those promises. They were alienated from the family of God. But now, Paul says in verse 13, But now, in Christ Jesus, you, who were once far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

[9:56] Now, this is the present moment that the Gentiles find themselves. They find themselves in Christ. They find themselves having been brought near by the blood of Christ to peace himself.

Now, the word there that we need to wrap our hearts around is that word brought. It's not that the dead and lifeless Gentiles lifted themselves up and carried themselves to Christ himself.

No, God intervened and shined the light of the glory of Jesus Christ into their hearts. It was purely an act of God's redeeming grace that the Gentiles can now say in the present that they are in Christ, that they have been brought near, that God himself has brought them near to Christ.

The once separated Gentiles brought near to Christ, not by their own merit or effort, but by God's grace alone. And so I want you to remember that.

I want you to remember this. By God's grace alone, you were brought near. By God's grace alone, you were brought near to peace. For some of you, I think that's a little bit easier to remember than others.

[11:19] It's easier for you to remember that you were near Christ by grace alone. And what do I mean? But what I mean by the fact that I say it's easier, what I mean is when some of you consider your lives before Christ, it's not hard to see that your life was totally devoid of God's presence and rule.

Your life was filled with all kinds of unmistakable immorality. And so for you, sometimes what happens is the guilt and shame of your former failures, the guilt and shame of your former life looms dark and heavy in your soul.

And so I want to speak to you, prodigal kids. I want to speak to you. I want to comfort you. And I want you to remember, brother.

Remember, sister. By God's grace alone, you have been brought near. Your guilt and shame was decisively drowned in the life-giving fountain of Christ's blood.

Now, there's some of you, on the other hand, who maybe you're more like me. And remembering that it's by grace alone is a little more challenging. And what do I mean by that? Well, I mean is that you were born into the faith.

[12:35] Now, let me unpack what I mean by that. Your earliest memories, your earliest memories are of church Christmas potlucks and the like.

Your earliest memories are of Advent hymn singings. Your earliest memories are of corporate worship. But, Paul speaks to us as well.

And in verse 11, he subtly reminded potential Jewish readers that circumcision is made by what? By human hands. And the point there is to remind them that their religious performance, their good works, are of no weight before the Lord.

The only reason the Jews found themselves a part of God's chosen family is just that. By God's electing grace alone. They found themselves surrounded by the covenant of promise by God's grace alone.

So, here's what happens for some of us church kids. We slip into this performance mentality. We see our basis before God is our religious performance and our moral complacentness.

[13:40] And so, here's what happens. When we begin to lose control. When we begin to feel as though our performance is waning. I don't know about you, but here's where my heart goes. My heart goes to anger and to anxiousness.

Because here's what's happening. I'm fearing in that moment that my performance isn't measuring up. And here's the thing. It's not. Our performance isn't measuring up. And so, to my church kids. I want you to remember, brother. Remember, sister. You are near to Christ today. By God's grace alone. Not your effort.

Rest in that. Remember, by grace alone, God brought us near to Christ. Peace himself. And Paul says, God did so.

Through the blood of Christ's cross. So, in 14 through 18, I want you to remember. Peace himself reconciled us through his cross.

[14:44] Throughout this middle section, what you'll notice are two themes woven together. Peace with God and peace with one another. They're almost inseparable. To conceive of the one.

To conceive of peace with God. And not peace with one another. Seems, to Paul, almost impossible. It seems rather silly to consider of one without the other.

And so, here's what we'll do. We'll look at the first. We'll look at peace with God first. And then we'll look at peace with one another second. What Paul outlines for us in 14 through 18 is the purpose of

Christ.

The purpose of Christ was to reconcile his people to God through his cross. Earlier in chapter 2, Paul reminded his readers that they were by birth objects of God's wrath because of their willful sinning.

Because of sin, there is a divine hostility that exists between our holy God and sinful humanity. But God, in his rich mercy, did what humanity could not do for itself.

[15 : 49] What did he do? Romans 8, he put forward his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the likeness of sin and for sinful flesh. And what did he do in the cross? He condemned sin in the cross.

When Christ was slain, there on the cross, the hostility between God and his people was brought to an end forever. And in verse 17, peace is being preached to sinners who are near and sinners who are far.

To prodigals and church kids, peace is being proclaimed in the cross. Peace is being proclaimed in the cross.

Christ's death is the announcement of peace to all kinds of sinners. Sinners who are near and sinners who are far.

Now, through faith in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles alike call God Father. More than that, the children of God have access to him through Christ by the one spirit.

[17 : 07] And in Christ, they have confidence that they will find mercy. That they will be welcomed with peace. Remember, friends, peace himself, the Lord Jesus, reconciled us to God through his cross.

Remember, church kids, you can lay down your anger and anxiety because Christ's cross really does reconcile you with God. And to my prodigal friends, you can really lay down your guilt and shame because Christ's cross truly does.

It really does reconcile you with God. And so I invite you, prodigals and church kids and unbelievers, to come to Christ by faith today.

To receive his mercy by faith. Come to Christ today and receive his peace with confidence.

Remember, the cross offers us peace with God.

And peace with one another. Based on sheer word count in 14 through 18, it seems that Paul's emphasis falls on the objective reality of peace between Gentile and Jew.

[18 : 24] Because of the blood of Christ, the two are, in verse 14, they are two that are made one. In verse 15, the two are one new man. And in verse 16, the two are now one body through the cross.

So what's Paul showing us here? He's showing us that hostility is dead. That hostility has died. Where there was once hostility, there is now peace. Peace is alive.

This is so, to the cross, the prince of peace destroyed the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. Ancient historian Josephus tells us about a literal dividing wall.

There was a dividing wall in the Jerusalem temple. It was a stone wall that divided the court of the Gentiles from the inner temple proper.

And this physical barrier represented the spiritual barrier that existed between Jew and Gentile by the law. The law with its detailed ordinances, with its ceremonies and regulations about cleanliness and uncleanness had the effect of creating hostility between the two ethnic groups.

[19 : 33] And what Paul says here is that in Christ, this dividing wall has been laid low. Because Christ is the fulfillment of all of these things.

Because Christ is the fulfillment of the commands and the ordinances and the cleanliness and the uncleanness. Christ is the fulfillment of all of these things in Matthew 5:18. And through his death, he reconciled Jew and Gentiles.

It's not that Gentiles get promoted to Jewish status. Rather, it's one new man. One new humanity. One new body in Christ. The things that once separated them have in Christ been made low.

The thing about our sinful hearts in this matter is we love to rebuild hostile dividing walls.

Where Christ's death has already secured peace. This is the sinful bent of our hearts. And sure, these aren't literal physical walls like the one Josephus described.

[20 : 34] But we will, I promise you, apart from the sanctifying presence of the Spirit, we will build divisions along all kinds of lines.

We will build divisions along ethnic and cultural lines. We will build divisions along lines of past experience. We will build divisions along socioeconomic lines. And I can name thing after thing after

thing after thing.

But brothers and sisters, because Christ himself is our peace, we have peace with one another. Our past lives nor your present performance determine who's in or who's out.

In Christ, we are one. We are one new man. We are one new body. Tim Keller once said, Christmas is the end of thinking you are better than someone else.

Because it's telling you that you could never get to heaven on your own. God had to come to you. Remember, through the cross, we have peace with one another.

[21 : 39] Remember, Christ himself is our peace. And so long as we are founded on him and his word, our churches will grow into a dwelling place of peace himself. By the Spirit.

Remember, in Christ, the God of peace dwells among us by the Spirit.

The metaphors continue in verse 19. The metaphors continue into this final section of this passage.

Here, Paul describes the people of God, the church of Ephesus, as fellow citizens. He calls them the household of God and he calls them the temple of God. And here's what Paul says about this family, about this new nation, so to speak.

He says, this family is founded on the preaching and teaching of the apostles and prophets. And so here's what we understand. To the apostles and to the prophets, the word of God was uniquely revealed.

[22 : 45] And it was the word of God that they proclaimed. And the highest place in their preaching, the place of honor in their proclamation, the main point of their message, the cornerstone of their preaching was Jesus Christ himself.

The prince of peace, the word of God in flesh, who, Paul says, is the one who binds the people of God together. Christ himself holds the church together.

Christ himself holds the church together.

Christ himself, we did that. As soon as it got dark, we loaded up in the minivan, headed to downtown Cornelia. It's been a lot of years since then.

My brother and I are both married. We have children. And you'll find us this Christmas Eve.

[24 : 12] As soon as it's dark. Piled in the car with grandparents. Pulling into Cornelia City Park. Traditions like these.

They take what is true in name. We're Harvey's. We're Harvey's. But the tradition brings it into time and space. It's true that we are Harvey's all year long.

But what this tradition does is it binds us and sustains the sense of family. And so it is with the preaching of God's word. So it is with the preaching of Christ and his word.

You see, the son of God broke into time and space. The son of God clothed himself in human flesh. The heavenly reality. The heavenly reality of the household of God in Christ.

Also breaks into time and space in local congregations. The household, the family, the citizenry of God. Breaks into time and space in local congregations.

[25 : 17] Who covenant together in church membership. On the sure foundation of Christ and his word. You see, the reformers taught us that the first mark of a true church. Is the faithful proclamation of Christ Jesus.

The faithful preaching of the gospel. So the proclamation of Jesus Christ is our family tradition. That creates, sustains, and builds the household of God. It is Christ faithfully proclaimed.

That dividing walls are laid low. And our sinful hearts are welcomed into the peace of God in Christ and by his spirit. Our family tradition is the weakling announcement.

That Christ himself is our peace. Remember, the church is built on Christ and his word.

And where Christ, the prince of peace, is faithfully proclaimed. Paul says there grows a holy temple in the Lord. Rather than using a more general word for the Old Testament temple.

[26 : 25] Paul uses a very specific word. One that refers to the innermost part of the temple. So in the Old Testament temple, this particular word.

Referred to the special meeting place of God with his people. It is the place on which the glory of the Lord descended. The place of his presence.

When Christ came. When the word of God was made flesh. He made the Old Testament temple obsolete. Because according to John chapter 2, 19 and 20.

Christ himself is the true temple of God. Christ Jesus himself is the true presence of God among his people. And so now what Paul says here in 2 Corinthians chapter 6.

He says that in the body of Christ in the local church. Where Christ is exalted. God himself dwells. By his spirit.

[27 : 23] The God of peace. Dwells among his people. And so in this final section. Paul reminds us. That we can't experience.

The God of peace. In isolation. We don't experience the God of peace on our own. Rather. The God of peace.

Walks among his people. In his church. By the spirit. The God of peace will meet you. In the communion of saints. In the local church. In fact.

Here in this place. Christ himself stands among us. By his spirit. Beckoning us through his word. To all who are weary and heavy laden.

To all who mourn and long for comfort. To all who sin and need a savior. Jesus himself beckons us through his word. Come to me. And I will give you peace.

[28 : 21] Remember. Remember. Jesus Christ himself. Is our peace. Let's pray together.