Ephesians 2:13-18

He Himself is Our Peace

Sermon

I want to start this morning by telling you a story of two unlikely companions. In the book of Acts chapter 21 we read the story of Paul, formerly Saul the Jewish Pharisee, and his companion Trophimus, an Ephesian Gentile. Two unlikely companions because Jews didn't hang out with Gentiles. To the Jew there were two types of people: there were God's chosen people, the Jews…and there was everyone else. They didn't eat with Gentiles, they didn't drink from the same vessel, and they didn't even set foot in the home of a Gentile. Now Paul's traveling companion is a Gentile from Ephesus named Trophimus.

Luke tells us that the Jews seized Paul in the temple in Jerusalem and dragged him out of the temple. In the temple, there was a court of the Jews, and a court of the Gentiles. Also, there was an area *within* the interior of the temple that no one, not even the Jews had access to. Only the High Priest once a year had access to the Most Holy Place – where the presence of God dwelt with His people. So the Jewish system of religion was a constant reminder of separation. Separation individually from God, and separation ethnically from one another. The accusation against Paul was that he brought Trophimus, the Ephesian Gentile into the temple area that was forbidden for Gentiles.

This arrest inevitably led Paul to his imprisonment in Rome where he remained 4 years. It was probably during his imprisonment in Rome that Paul wrote the book of Ephesians. ***So these words to the Ephesians that we just read about peace, and access, and unity were very likely written by Paul as a prisoner in Rome – while imprisoned for traveling with a Gentile named Trophimus from Ephesus. Amazing…it really illuminates the colorful language that Paul uses – He Himself is Our Peace. And "He has ABOLISHED THE DIVIDING WALL".***

Paul gives a glorious vision in Ephesians about God's plan to reconcile all things – things in heaven and things on earth - in Christ. We just finished an election – Ephesians tells us of God's campaign in the fullness of time to reconcile all things through Jesus. ***God's campaign strategy to bring about peace is like nothing we've ever seen.*** No man could devise such a campaign strategy! The Son of God who condescends, coming to the earth and shedding His blood for His enemies on the cross, dying, and rising again conquering death, and then ascending to heaven to the right hand of God from where He rules over all things…but the campaign continues. He then takes His reconciled and redeemed people who He purchased with His blood and sends them out to be His ambassadors of peace to every corner of the earth. Last week we talked about the fact that the church is filled by Christ so that we might then go and fill all things in all places (1:23). Everywhere we go – we are to be ministers of reconciliation – because we've been reconciled to God through the blood of His own Son Jesus. ***But it's not only the mission of the church, it's also the very structure because the church itself is being built into a holy household brick by brick with reconciled people from every tongue, tribe, language, and nation.*** Now THAT'S a campaign strategy! No human campaign could ever come close to the peace and reconciliation that God brings about through Jesus.

If Christ were to run with a campaign slogan, it might be something like "He Himself is Our Peace" in v.14. True peace can only come about through Jesus Christ!

3 things for us to consider in vv.11-18 that characterize the campaign of Jesus to bring about reconciliation to the world.

1. The campaign of Jesus creates authentic unity (2:11-13)

> ***Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— [12] remember that you were 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.***

We see here the problem between Jew and Gentile. Paul ***"reminds"*** them of their former status as Gentiles: they were ***"uncircumcised"*** – circumcision was the cutting of the flesh that marked them as God's covenant people. They were formerly **"*separated from Christ*",** and ***"alienated from the commonwealth of Israel"*** – the word "commonwealth" speaks of citizenship. They were citizens of Rome, but alienated to the citizenship of Israel – God's nation… ***"strangers to the covenants of promise"*** – all of the blessings and privileges of Israel, God's people, and ultimately the promise given to Israel that a seed would one day come through them…Jesus Christ the Messiah. They did not formerly have this promise. ***"having no hope"*** and "***without God in the world*"** – the word here is "atheist". They didn't have God because they followed many false gods. There is only one true God who we must worship. So Paul, the Jew, is reminding these Gentiles of their former state – **"*remember this!*"**.

A key to reconciling with others is remembering how far off you once were. Do you remember?

> v. 13 - ***"But now*** [you have to love the "but now's" in Scripture – God has done something about this!] ***in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near*** [this is a passive voice verb – it's something that happened to the Gentiles, they did not bring this about – God did this! The Jewish God reached out to the Gentiles!] ***by the blood of Christ."*** [the word "Christ" you remember means Messiah. The Jewish Messiah who the prophets promised to the Jews had shed His blood for the Jews and the Gentiles! This was a radical thought to Jewish Paul. God was no longer making distinctions between Jew and Gentile as in the past. A new era had begun brought about by a New Covenant]

God has launched His campaign to create authentic unity! He always had this plan….to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob God gives the promise over and over that they would be a "***blessing to the nations***" (Gen. 12:3 - Abe; 26:4 - Isaac; 28:14 - Jacob)…and that the blessing would ultimately come through the Jewish Messiah, Jesus who was to be a "***light to the nations***" (Isa. 42:6), His blood would "***sprinkle the nations***" (Isa. 52:15; Eze. 36:24-26)

Only Jesus can create an authentic unity because the unity of Jesus is thicker than biological blood or the physical marking of circumcision. Now Jew and Gentile have "been brought near by the blood of Christ".

This passage is FILLED with unity language: v.14 – He has ***"made us both one"***. Again, in v.15 – Jesus has created ***"one new man in place of the two, so making peace***". V.16 – He has united us into ***"one body"*** the church.

I remember having a conversation with Eric Smoot…he's the owner of a gym that I worked at in Wilmette. Eric is an African-American and this was around the time of George Floyd…Eric is extremely passionate about ANYTHING he has an opinion about, but he's always gracious to listen as well. So we talked about BLM and reparations, and CRT…and all of that. As we were going back and forth about all of the different ways that racism should be resolved in our country…I just stopped and asked him, "Eric, I wish you would just come to my church (at the time I was going to City Line Bible Church). In my church every tribe, tongue, and nation is represented but there is no hostility there because all of us have a common united truth that is outside of us and greater than race – we are united by the gospel! If you come to my church you will see everyone with hands raised all together praising the same Lord and Savior!

In Revelation 5 we get a heavenly picture by the apostle John of the church – it is made up of people from every tribe, language, people, and nation. Jesus brings them all together by His blood.

> **for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. (Rev. 5:9)**

All of the arguments we make as to why we can't reconcile with one another. You can't argue with a lamb who was slain for your sin. Who purchased you by His blood. Who reconciled you to God. All of our excuses and arguments as to why we can't or shouldn't seek to reconcile with others are removed when the lamb who was slain asks us to reconcile.

2. The campaign of Jesus tears down walls of separation (Eph. 2:14-16)

Not all walls are bad, but not all walls are good. Some walls are good because they provide protection - the book of Nehemiah tells the story of God rebuilding the wall surrounding Jerusalem. This was to protect God's people from outside invaders. (the "wall" of Jerusalem is what established it as a city, a country without borders is not a country)

Not ALL walls are good. The Berlin Wall that was erected on August 13, 1961 stood to imprison the people of East Berlin under communism and prevent them from escaping to western Europe. Not all walls are good. Some walls protect, some walls enslave…

Some walls create a separation. In Paul's day, when he and Trophimus entered Jerusalem, there was a wall in the temple that separated the court of the Jews from the court of the Gentiles. It was called the "Soreg". The inscription on the wall read: "***Let no foreigner enter within the partition and enclosure surrounding the temple. Whoever is arrested will himself be responsible for his death which will follow***." The Jewish historian Josephus writes about this wall and it's very possible that this was the wall Paul was accused of taking Trophimus past in Acts 21. It could be the "***dividing wall***" that Paul was thinking of when he writes in v.14: Jesus "***has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility***".

For certain, Paul is also talking about the law itself: Jesus has broken down the wall, "***by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances*** (v.15). The physical wall – the Soreg –

stood as a physical representation of the ethnic separation between Jew and Gentile. The Mosaic law, created a separation because the covenant of the law, ratified through circumcision, was for the Jew, not for the Gentile. To be a participant of the law of Moses as a Gentile, you literally had to become Jewish – you had to become circumcised and leave your ethnicity behind.

Now to discuss the ways that the law has been abolished ("nullified") is a massive study, there are ways that the law is actually fulfilled, there are ways that we still uphold the law (Paul says in Rom. 3:31 – I do NOT nullify, same word, the law but fulfill it), so when you read about the law being nullified in Scripture you have to take the context into consideration: **"Abolished how Paul?"** I think HERE Paul is referring to the law in its entirety as a system and as a covenant – specifically a covenant that created a separation between Jew and Gentile. This covenant is "nullified", or, "abolished", because now Jesus has inaugurated a New Covenant. The Mosaic law is no longer the means by which we have a covenant relationship with God. Therefore, the items of the law that kept the Gentiles out…what you might call the "ceremonial" or "signifying" items of the law – circumcision, dietary laws, the sacrificial system itself…all of this is "nullified" through the New Covenant and the way is now open to the Gentiles as well. Christ's campaign tears down walls of separation because the Mosaic law, which was a barrier between Jew and Gentile, has been abolished. Now there is "***neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal. 3:28***) because the Mosaic law that highlighted these distinctions is gone – the New Covenant has come.

Under the New Covenant, circumcision is now by the Spirit of God (**Rom. 2:28-29**). The blessing foretold by the prophets, and promised to Israel that would come in the latter days has come – "I will pour out my Spirit ***on all flesh***" (**Joel 2**:**28**). "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." (**Jer. 31:31**). This future covenant, that was promised to the Jew, has been extended to the Gentiles as well. In **Amos 9:17** God speaks of the remnant seeking Him, "***and all the Gentiles who are called by my name***". All the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Jewish people that they would be a blessing to "***all the families of the earth"*** (Gen. 12, 26,28) are now fulfilled through the Jewish Messiah, Jesus.

3. Jesus preaches His campaign of peace to the near and far (2:17-18)

The campaign of peace brought about by Jesus comes about not through force, or through war, but through preaching! Not a politician preaching peace…but Jesus Christ, the Son of God who was slain for the sin of the world preaching peace.

> **and He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. (Eph. 2:17)**

Paul is almost verbatim alluding to Isaiah 57:19 here from the LXX:

> **"Peace, peace, to the far and to the near" (Isa. 57:19)**

There are some interesting things to note about Paul's allusion to Isaiah 57:19.

First, the broader context of Isaiah is the coming of the Messiah and a day when foreigners and Eunuchs will come to the house of the Lord to worship. For example, in Isaiah 56:7 we read: **for my house shall be called *a house of prayer for all peoples*. (Isaiah 56:7). Isaiah is speaking of the temple – God's house – a house of prayer for ALL PEOPLES.**

Second, in the immediate context of Isaiah 57, Isaiah is speaking of people who have received comfort, who have been revived, who are forgiven and the "fruit of their lips", their preaching, will be "peace, peace to the far and to the near". Those who are at peace with God preach peace to others. "Shalom, Shalom to the far and to the near!" The Jews would great one another this way. Peace to the Jew who is far, and the Jew who is near***. But Paul here is giving a greater fulfillment of this verse.***

Here is what's very interesting about Paul's use of Isaiah 57:19. In Isaiah, it's those who have been comforted, forgiven, revived who preach "peace, peace". Paul says here, "HE came and preached peace". So it's JESUS who preaches peace, but He does it ***through*** those who have been comforted, revived, and forgiven. Those who are brought to peace with Messiah will preach peace to the far and to the near. Now…who are the far and the near?

Isaiah says, "Shalom, Shalom to the far and to the near" speaking of the Jews…but Paul interprets and changes the wording slightly in a brilliant way to read, "peace to the far off" - the Gentiles – "and peace to those who were near" – the Jews. Paul does this often in the NT and this is well within the bounds of Jewish interpretation by the way…he is giving a "midrash" a Jewish interpretation of an OT passage.

Here is what Paul is saying: Jesus preaches peace to the far off, the Gentiles, and to the near, the Jews…and He does it through those who have been forgiven, revived, and comforted.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah 57:19 through His preaching to the Gentiles far off and to the Jews who are near through the forgiven, comforted, and reconciled church. I have no doubt that this was a verse very dear to Paul because it was a confirmation of his calling to reach the Gentiles.

Last verse…

> **For through him [through Jesus] we both [both Jew and Gentile alike] have access in one Spirit to the Father.** (2:18)

The Jew who was "near" was also separated. They were unable to enter in to the Most Holy Place – the veil was a constant reminder of their separation from God. Jesus, the Great High Priest has tore the veil and now the way is open. The Gentile who was "far off" and was separated from God by an entire Jewish system, physically represented by the Soreg in the temple…Jesus has "***abolished the dividing wall" between Jew and Gentile and both now have access to God.***

I **just want to ask you in closing, are their people that you're reluctant to preach "peace" to?** I'm not just talking about people that you have a personal history with. Are there "groups" of people…tribes, they speak a different language than you…they are "far off" from God. I just want to say that I'm with you…it's hard for me at times too. People can be awkward especially when they're different from us – they look different, they believe different, some people have embraced a lifestyle that is just "foreign" to us. **Two things I try to remind myself:**

1. **I once was "far off" from God.** But God sent people to me who were willing to enter in to my life. Start a dialogue with me. Treat me with respect while at the same time preaching truth to me. Sometimes it's helpful to "remember" how far I was gone! Then after I remember…I look out and see those who are "far off" and instead of looking down on them I

can come alongside of them and say, “I was FAR OFF…I was FAR GONE…but Jesus came preached peace to me.”

2. **Be careful putting others into a “tribe” or under a “label**”. I said this last week but anything worth saying is worth saying twice. They may be closer to God than you realize! People are extremely complex…there was so much more to Trophimus than “Gentile” or “uncircumcised”. Paul was willing to cross the gap. I have to treat each individual as an individual created in the image of God. God knew them in the womb. God crafted them and has a plan for them. He WEEPS over their rebellion. He loves them. Here’s the challenge this week…start a conversation with that person. Get to know them. Ask them their story. And pray for God to open doors to preach peace to them.