

Jason Upchurch - Christmas Eve 2022 - Colossians 1:15-23 - Peace on Earth

As we gather this evening to celebrate the Lord's birth I want you to open your Bible to **Col. 1**. A couple of months ago I mentioned to Andy and Chuck and Ellis that there are so many things we could talk about surrounding Christmas: the promises of God fulfilled in Jesus, the miracles surrounding Jesus's birth, the wise men and who they are, joy, the deep things of Jesus being fully God and fully man. One year I did a sermon just on Matthew's genealogy. There's so much to consider so I asked them for ideas to help narrow it down.

And Ellis mentioned focusing on peace. And I liked that idea. So this evening as we gather in anticipation of the the Lord Jesus coming into the world we our focus is on peace. That's the big picture: Jesus has brought us peace.

And the passage we are looking at this evening is one of the most beautiful passages in the NT, talking about who Jesus is and what he has done. And the crescendo of the whole thing is that he has made **peace** for us.

Peace throughout the Bible is a very big deal, starting in eternity past before anything was created.

Peace was the state that God enjoyed for all eternity past. When it was just God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - in eternity past there was no conflict. No disunity, no strife, no competition, no sin, no wrath, no vengeance. There was only ever eternal peace and unity in the Godhead.

Then God created. He created everything good. On day 6 he created Adam and Eve and pronounced it very good. On day 7 he rested. There was peace even after God created created.

And although we don't know exactly when Adam and Eve fell into sin, if I were to guess it was probably about 9am on Day 8.

And the moment Adam sinned the peace that had existed for all eternity was destroyed. There was no longer peace between God and man. Sin had entered into the world and because of sin came death. And the wrath of God was aimed at mankind because of sin.

Peace was also destroyed between Adam and Eve - Eve's curse was that she, and every wife after her, would desire to overthrow her husband's authority and yet he would rule over her. There's tension in marriage; the most fundamental family unit.

God also cursed the ground and it's as though the ground is warring against men. The ground naturally produces the exact opposite of what humanity needs to survive. It produces weeds when what we need is food. So man strives against the ground, and the Bible says that the ground is groaning back waiting for the return of Jesus.

Peace is gone. The very next story in Genesis is God killing an animal to cover Adam and Eve - no peace there. The next story is Cain killing Abel out of jealousy - no peace there. The next story is Cain's family line that culminates in a man named Lamech singing a song to his 2 wives - I promise you that's not peaceful. And the song he sings is about taking vengeance on a young man who apparently struck him.

And the Bible records nothing but violence and strife and war from that point onward. The reason there is no peace is because sin entered into the world. All of mankind is now sinful by nature and by choice. It is so bad that only 6 chapters into the Bible God decides to drown the whole world in a flood, Genesis says, because there was so much violence. The very opposite of peace.

And as tragic as war and strife is among mankind, the bigger issue is that sin brought with it war against God. Sin is fundamentally rebellion against a holy God to whom we owe every breath we take and all our allegiance. Sin is wanting to do things our way and actually sit on God's throne call the shots for our life.

And we often downplay just how much our sin grieves God. How bad can it really be to God? Just one example: The prophet Jonah was called by God to go preach to Nineveh, a very wicked city. And the message

God tells him to proclaim to Nineveh is essentially: repent or die. God wasn't playing games. Nineveh's sin was over-the-top.

God can judge us or discipline us at any time for rebelling against him and ultimately he wins the battle.

That's why Psalm 2 says that even though the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain seeking to thwart God's sovereignty over them, God sits in the heavens and laughs. God is not intimidated by us.

Heb 9:27 says that it is appointed for a man to die once and then comes what? Judgement. Eternal wrath in hell forever. Checkmate.

So because we are sinners we are at war with God and God is at war with us - whether we know it or not. That's an awfully big problem.

But here's the amazing thing: if you look all through the Scriptures God continually seeks peace with sinful man. Peace is always on his mind.

The reason he slaughtered an animal for Adam and Eve right after they sinned was to cover them and protect them. Even after Cain murdered his brother, God graciously offered protection from vengeful family members. God seeks peace.

The city of the Jews is Jerusalem: Jeru means city, Salem means peace. It's the city of peace - or it's supposed to be the city of peace. God instituted the entire sacrificial system as a means by which people sought peace with God through offering sacrifices in faith. In fact, in **Lev. 7** there is even a special "peace offering" that people can bring to God.

God constantly offers terms of peace to Israel, he constantly offers terms of peace to the nations. Ironically, when Jonah went to Nineveh he was hoping God would destroy that people. That God would unleash judgment like Sodom and Gomorrah. And yet the city repented and turned to God. Jonah was actually mad that God chose to be merciful to the city and spare the lives of over 120,000 people. Because he suspected God would be merciful and was angry when God pardoned their sin. He knew the Lord was a merciful God.

But despite all God's efforts to establish peace in OT, people were still rebellious. The sacrifices never really worked that's why they had to keep offering them. The people never really followed God from their heart. Sure, there were those who truly had faith in Yahweh but they were always a small remnant.

What does all that have to do with Christmas? Well, what we celebrate at Christmas is God doing a new work through Jesus to establish lasting, eternal, glorious peace. We could say that when God sent his Son into the world he was establishing peace once and for all. He established peace between those who had historically been hostile to each other: Jew and Gentile. But more importantly he establishes it between himself and all those who repent from their sin and believe in Jesus.

This little section, which is actually an early church hymn or poem, clearly lays out who Jesus is and what he has done and gloriously the whole thing culminates in peace.

Now there's a lot of overlap in the descriptions of Jesus, so we won't get too bogged down. But it is a glorious section. Let's take a look. **Read 15**

So Jesus is the image of the invisible God. That is, he is God in the flesh. Hark, the Herald Angel's Sing: Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity.

God is spirit - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God for all eternity past did not have a body or any substance. But when the Father sent the Son into the world the Son took on a body for all eternity future. And so to look on Jesus was to look on God. When we see Jesus in bodily form in heaven we will be staring at God, the second person of the Trinity.

That's who Jesus is: God in the flesh. Immanuel: God with us.

And he is the first born over all creation. The firstborn in a family was the one in charge, they outranked all their siblings and carried the family name. The point is not that Jesus is the first created. Jesus was never created, he has always existed. But his rank is the highest over the entire created order. He is over all that he has made, even as he graciously believes to rule with him. **Read 16**

A lot of people want to debate whether Jesus was God. He was God, is God. As the second person of the Trinity he has always been and will always be fully divine and we see this clearly in his act of creation. By him - by Jesus - all things were created.

There are only 2 categories of things in existence. Things that are created and things that are not created. The only thing **not** created is God. Everything else was created. And it was created specifically through the Son: Jesus Christ. Was the Father involved? Yes. Was the Holy Spirit involved? Yes. But Jesus is the agent, the person of the Trinity most directly involved in creation.

And he created everything that exists, whether you see it or not. He also created spiritual beings: thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities describes various parts of the spiritual world that exists all around us that we can't see but is very real. Jesus created it all, and he created it all for himself.

Now, beginning in **Vs. 17** we start seeing a bunch of the overlap I mentioned earlier. These features that we see are not to make a bunch of new distinctions. They are to further emphasize just how exalted Jesus is. **Read 17**

He is before all things: that gets to his pre-existence. Jesus existed before **Genesis 1:1**. As God he was there before anything was there. See, when the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary and she conceived, it wasn't that Jesus was created at that point. Jesus has always existed. What happened in Mary's womb was that the eternal Son of God also took on human flesh. He had always had a divine nature, but he added to that a human nature.

Now this is where it gets deep:

Vs. 17: And in him all things hold together. When the Spirit came upon Mary and she conceived Jesus: at first 1 cell, 2 cells, 4 cells, 8 cells, 16, 1 million cells, when he was the size of a blueberry in her womb, when he was only 1 pound in her womb, 6 months in her womb - at every point before and every point after Jesus has held the entire universe together.

The little baby in the manger? Jesus asleep in the boat? Holding the entire created cosmos together.

How did he do that? How can a baby 32 cells big hold the universe together? He can't in his human nature; but he can in his divine nature.

This is the miracle and the mystery: God in flesh.

See Jesus is not a mixture of God and human like you put some ingredients in a mixing bowl and whip up some batter. No, he had two natures that were somehow together but also separate: As the creed says: two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.

How does Jesus hold the universe together? Because Jesus in his divine nature as God holds it all together. He has since the dawn of time, he did at every point while he was here on earth, and he will forevermore. **Read 18**

This is the spiritual authority that Jesus has in the life of believers. The ultimate spiritual authority in your life is not your dad, it's not your husband, it's not even your pastor. Those all do have authority. But the ultimate spiritual authority in your life is Jesus. He is the head of the church.

In the NT the church doesn't refer to a building so much as all Christians in all places at all times. And Jesus is the head. He guides and directs and has ultimate authority in our lives. How do we know he has that authority?

Read 18

How do we know he has that authority? Because he rose from the dead. That's kind of the ace in the hole.

I was listening to a back and forth by an atheist and a Christian the atheist said the reason they rejected Christianity was because the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. That's impossible, they said. After 3 days the body has already begun to break down in a way that is impossible to recover. Cells start to decompose, blood has started to coagulate and the nervous system is not recoverable.

To which the Christian said: I know. Which is why when Jesus rose from the dead it was a pretty big deal. This was the greatest miracle of all time. Jesus dies on the cross for the sins of his people, but he doesn't stay dead. The triune Godhead brings him back to life proving he is Lord over all creation.

How do we know Jesus is the head of the body the church? How do we know he is the Lord of lords? He rose from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus from the grave is that most significant event in the entire course of human history and because of it we know that he is preeminent. He is first and chief and above all things.

And just in case we missed that he is divine, that he is God. **Read 19**

All that it is to be God, the entire divine nature dwells in Jesus. In **2:9** he says it just a little differently: For in him the fullness of deity dwells bodily.

Jesus is God, and he is fully God.

You ever had a water ballon that was so full you knew if you added even a little more it would burst? That's kind of how it is with Jesus. He's not a little bit God, he doesn't have a touch of divine nature; a teaspoon or two. No, in him everything that it is to be God dwells in the fullest possible amount ready to burst forth in glory.

That's who Jesus is: fully God, preeminent, the head of the church, the risen Lord of all the universe. God didn't send second fiddle into the world. He didn't send the JV team or the 4th string. He sent his only Son.

Why? Why send God the Son into the world? What was the goal? To make peace. **Read 19-20**

This is why Jesus came. To bring peace. Peace with who? Peace between sinful man and holy God.

See, the problem of sin was so great that God himself had to take on flesh to bring about the salvation of his people.

Sin is so grievous and so wicked that God would be good and right and just and praised for casting all humanity into hell forever. That's what we deserve for rebelling against God.

But the glory of Christmas is that God sent his Son Jesus into the world to reconcile it to himself. Does that mean that everyone will be saved? That everyone's sin is forgiven automatically? No.

When you reconcile your checkbook or your bank account what you're doing is squaring it all up so that everything is accounted for. You want it all in order. Debits and credits are all accounted for. What Paul is saying is that all things will be reconciled based on Jesus. All things will be accounted for based on what they do with Jesus.

So why did Jesus come into the world? To bring peace. **Read 20**

The Father didn't send the Son into the world as some last ditch, Hail Mary effort because he was out of options. No, God sent Jesus into the world as the greatest demonstration that he is about the work of peace.

Because of sin we have made war with God. But God in his grace has sent Jesus to bring about peace by the blood of his cross. The apostle is talking about the death of Jesus. How Jesus made peace was that on the cross the wrath of God was poured out full measure on Jesus for all who believe in him. God's wrath toward his people is exhausted on Jesus.

That's how we get peace. Jesus satisfies the wrath of God for those who believe in him. It doesn't come automatically to all people. It doesn't come by just being a good person or praying once in a while or cracking open a Bible occasionally. Here's how that peace comes. **Look at 21-23**

The peace God gives comes when we recognize that we're alienated and hostile in mind to God. And that we do evil deeds. This is acknowledging our sin.

And we become holy and blameless in God's sight - not by works, not by trying to be do-gooders. But because God presents us holy and blameless simply because we have enduring faith in Jesus. **Read 22-23**

We're presented holy and blameless - we're saved from our sins - if we continue in the **faith**. The peace God offers is when someone turns from their sin and puts their faith in the Lord Jesus alone to rescue them from sin. Not their works, not their good deeds, but in Jesus who died for sins and rose again and reigns forever.

This is what we celebrate at Christmas. This is why Jesus came into the world: to bring eternal peace between God and man.

Have you trusted in Christ? Do you have peace with God? If you don't, trust in Christ.

If you have trusted in Jesus, know that you have lasting eternal, peace with God.

Pray