Jesus Is Our Peace

Ephesians 2:11-22

Key Verse: 2:14 “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the diving wall of hostility,”

The words ‘peace’ and ‘unity’ are those which we frequently use at home, at work, in church and in the world. These two words are the theme of today’s passage. I need peace, you need peace, and we all need peace. This indicates that we are in constant war. The opposite word of ‘peace’ is war. As long as we have war, we have no peace. There were peace and unity problems in the Ephesian church between the Jewish believers and the gentile believers. The Ephesian church was built by the Apostle Paul, who in this passage is now in prison in Rome. Paul wrote this letter to promote peace and unity among these two groups of church members who had racial differences, a cultural gap, and national preferences. Let us study how Paul instructed and encouraged them to have peace and unity in the Lord. Let us learn how God worked for our peace and unity through Jesus Christ. Amen.

First, remember who we were. In verses 11,12 the verb “remember” appears two times. Look at verses 11-12. “***Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)- remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in world***.” (11,12) In the Ephesian church, the Jewish believers and the gentile believers worshiped God together. Paul encouraged the gentile believers to remember who they were before they became Christians so that they might be thankful for the grace of salvation. The Gentiles were all non-Jews. They were called “uncircumcised”, which means they were not Abraham’s descendants. The Gentiles had been separate from Christ, the Promised Messiah, which meant that they were far away from salvation. They had no citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. They weren’t able to share in God’s promise with the Jews, the circumcised people. They had no hope because they had no eternal life and no kingdom of God. They had no God, which meant that they were children of the devil and objects of God’s wrath. In short, they were people without hope and without spiritual and human vision. They were pitiful and miserable people.

It is not too much for us to remember who we were, what kind of sinners we used to be before we become God’s children, and how God saved us from our sins. We were all gentiles, not only ethnically, but also spiritually before we become God’s people. We followed the ways of this world and were slaves of the ruler of the air. We craved the desires of our flesh and we deserved God’s wrath. We were dead in our sins and transgressions. We were far away from the promise of God and near to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. We were children of Satan and objects of God’s divine judgment.

Then, how were we and they changed through faith in Jesus? Verse 13 says, “***But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ***.” In the past we were far away from the presence of God. We were far away from the promise of salvation. But now in Jesus by his precious blood we have been brought near God and near eternal life. In the past we were foreigners, but now we became citizens of God’s kingdom through Jesus. We are citizens of God’s kingdom. The story of Kenneth Bae moved my heart. The Korean-American missionary Kenneth Bae was arrested in North Korea while he was doing humanitarian works there. The North Korean government falsely accused him of being a spy and sent him to a hard labor camp. Missionary Bae suffered much working day and night in such a hostile and horrible labor camp. He missed his family very much. He was hospitalized several times when he was ill. His family in America worried about his health. Despite such adverse situations, Mr. Bae believed that he would be freed from the camp because he had American citizenship. He believed that the America government would work for his release because he is an American citizen. Finally, he was released from N. Korea with his prison mate and returned to his home two years ago.

In the same way, we were imprisoned in a prison camp located far away from our homeland. We had to work hard day and night in a labor camp under our slave master, who is Satan. No one would recognize or remember us if we died in this remote prison camp. But God remembered us and delivered us from this prison camp. He remembered us because we are his children and we have citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. I am not sure whether the US government paid a ransom for Bae’s release or not, but God paid the ransom for our salvation by the blood of Jesus. God paid the price for our sins by the blood of Jesus, and he set us free from the slavery of sin, breaking the vicious cycle and the chains of this cursed life. In the past we were far away from the kingdom of God. Now we are very near the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus’ blood. In the past we were separate from Christ Jesus, but now we have Jesus in our hearts and in the center of our lives.

Second, Jesus himself is our peace. There was an American movie comedy called “The Interview”, which was about the assassination of Kim Jeong Un, the young leader of North Korea. Some Americans think that North Korea is the most dangerous and threatening country to the US. North Koreans always say that America is the worst enemy of theirs. There is a hostility between these two nations. There is no peace as long as there is hostility between them. I had a chance to meet North Korean soldiers during the International summer conference in Moscow Russia in 2002. At that time Sarah Barry and our journey team shared the same cafeteria with the North Korean soldiers because we used the same conference site. The NK soldiers were surprised to hear that Sarah Barry had attended the Arirang Festival in Pyungyang North Korea the same year. She visited Pyungyang for the first time to plant the seed of prayer for N. Korea. She said to the soldiers that she was impressed by the card section at the climax of the festival, which showed the huge word, “Peace’ in Korean. And she said to the NK soldiers, “The card section was a spectacular program, and the word “Peace” was very impressive. But real peace does not come from bombs or guns, but from Jesus, who died for the sins of the world. There is true peace in Jesus!” As soon as they heard about the word “Jesus”, the North Korean soldiers left the restaurant. It is true that peace does not come from guns or bombs, but from Jesus Christ. Peace and unity do not come from gun control or street protests, but from Jesus Christ, who has made the two groups one by destroying the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility between the US and N. Korea, between the West and Islam, between white and black, between neighbors, between coworkers, between brothers and sisters, between husband and wife, between parents and children, and so on.

How did Jesus become peace for us and for the world? Verse 14 says that Jesus destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. Verse 16 says that in one body he reconciled two bodies to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. Jesus himself became a sin offering for reconciliation. Jesus took in this hostility in his own body on the cross, between God and sinners, between nation and nation, between people and people, between tribe and tribe, between community and community, between brother and sister, between husband and wife, between parent and children, and so on. On the cross Jesus prayed “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Lk 23:34) Jesus forgave even his enemies who accused him, arrested him, and crucified him. Jesus prayed a priestly prayer for the forgiveness of sin. When we are forgiven, we have peace. When we forgive, we have peace. We gain peace through the forgiveness of sin.

The Bible says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. (He 9:22) In order to forgive our sins, Jesus shed his precious blood on the cross. The blood of Jesus has power to cleanse all our sins. (1Jn 1:7) His blood is a sign of the full payment for our sins and the assurance of our salvation. As the lamb of God, Jesus became our sin offering and peace offering between God and us. In the past, sinners could not come to the holy God. Only a high priest could enter to the Most Holy Place once a year with animals’ blood for the atonement of his sins and the sins of his people. But Jesus, as our new high priest, entered the throne room of God by his own blood for our eternal redemption.

What happened in the temple when Jesus died on the cross? The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Mt 27:51) This meant that God destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, between God and sinners through Jesus’ death on the cross. God himself opened this new and living way for sinners to come to him through Jesus. (He 10:20) So, verse 18 says, “***For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit***.” Here, ‘we both’ indicates the Jews and the Gentiles. Through his death on the cross and resurrection, Jesus brought peace between the Jews and the Gentiles. Through his death on the cross Jesus brought peace between God and sinners. Romans 5:1,2a says, “*Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand*.”

Third, we work together. When we are forgiven, we become children of God and we have peace with God. What does God want us to do with this peace? Paul said that God has a divine purpose for his work of salvation. Look at verse 15b-18. “…***His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both access to the Father by one Spirit***.” Here we learn that God created one new humanity out of the two groups through the cross of Jesus. God made one new creation out of the two. Now Paul begins to talk about unity. Since Jesus destroyed the wall of hostility between the two groups, they can be united. They can become one. There is no Jew or gentile in Jesus. There is no free or slave in Jesus. There is white or black in Jesus. We are all God’s children and one family in Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

Jesus himself is peace. He also preached peace to the world. We also must be the apostles of peace. We must be the ambassadors of peace for the world; peace from sin, peace with God, and peace for the world. Paul encouraged the believers in the Ephesian Church to work together for this purpose. He wanted the Jews and the Gentiles to work together in order to establish the kingdom of God in unity. Look at verses 19-22. “***Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit***.” We cannot build a house all by ourselves. We must work together. Here the word ‘together’ is repeated twice. Building God’s kingdom is not one man’s task. The Jews and the Gentiles must work together. Jesus is our cornerstone. On this foundation we must build the house of God together with one heart and mind. Making unity and peace require mutual initiation and participation. As we have studied, the Triune God, God the Father, God the Son Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit also worked together for our salvation. In order to save us, God the Father sent his Son Jesus to the cross, and the Holy Spirit changed us when we believed in Jesus. If the Triune God worked together, then why are we not? Let us repent of our selfishness and pride and work together for God’s salvation and for his peace for the world. May God bless us when we have peace with God. May God bless us when we work together in unity for his kingdom. May God bless America for us to be a united kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Amen.