

Christmas Is Here

Peace

Series Overview

As we celebrate Advent, the Scriptures remind us that with Jesus' birth, there came a new possibility of peace, joy, and hope for us all.

Sermon Introduction

When the angels appeared to the shepherds in the fields, they proclaimed, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14). It sounds nice, but our lives and the world often feel anything but peaceful. In his letter to the Ephesian church, the Apostle Paul clues us into the peace our hearts yearn for and how Jesus is the peace we need.

Passage: Ephesians 2:11-18 (NIV)

Eph. 2:11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—

Eph. 2:12 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 the world.

Eph. 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Eph. 2:14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

Eph. 2:15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,

Eph. 2:16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Eph. 2:17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

Eph. 2:18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions

1. Read the passage. What stood out to you? Was there anything that you found surprising or confusing?

2. Read v. 11. One of the challenges of the church in Paul's day was that it was essentially a new religion that emerged from the Jewish faith and people ("the circumcision"), but now included non-Jews (Gentiles, the "uncircumcised")--two profoundly distinct groups of people now united in a relationship with God in Jesus (v. 14). Think about some of the deep divisions in our present society (e.g., racial, socio-economic, political). Do you think that unity across those lines of division is possible in the church today? Based on this passage, do you think that kind of unity is something we should pursue? Why or why not?
3. For Jews, the law and circumcision were signs of their privileged status with God as his chosen people. According to Paul, however, Gentiles now share in this privileged status (vv. 12-13). According to this passage, what did we do to achieve such privileged status before God?
4. In vv. 14-16, Paul describes Jesus' act of making peace as both *destructive* and *constructive*: he destroys the barrier between the Jews and Gentiles and creates a new unified people in himself. What are the obstacles we face when it comes to making peace with other people?
5. How would you describe the difference between peace *making* and peace *keeping*? Which do you think is easier? Do you tend towards one or the other?
6. The kind of peace that Jesus gives is multi-dimensional: peace with ourselves, peace with God, and peace with others. How would you describe the relationship between these three dimensions? Is one more important than the others? Can you have one without the others?
7. How does the gospel--the reality that you are saved by grace (Eph 2:8-9)--uniquely empower you to find peace within yourself and make peace with others?

Prayer

Often a position of submission helps us physically connect with the spiritual reality of meeting God. A posture of kneeling with open hands can demonstrate our willingness to submit to God's power.

- Praise God for how he has changed your status on the basis of your faith in Jesus.
- Thank him that Jesus came to make peace for us with God so that we could have peace within ourselves and with others.
- Confess any ways that you have rested in your "privileged" status rather than carried out Jesus' mission to "preach peace to [those] who were far away" (v. 17).
- Ask God to reveal to you if there's someone you need to make peace with this week, and for the courage to do so.