

INTRODUCTION

- I. In the spring of 2019, a meeting of epic proportions took place. In the wake of the murder of the rapper Nipsey Hussle, a member of the Rollin 60s Neighborhood Crips but known for his philosophy of non-violence, members of different gangs in Los Angeles met up for a “unity meeting.”

The first “unity event” saw 15 people from various gangs meet up to talk, with another meeting taking place the next day attracting over 100 people from more than 30 gangs.

At these meetings, someone associated with the Rollin 60s invited anyone involved with street gangs in LA to attend a vigil at the site of the murder. At the memorial, members of rival gangs whose feuds were deemed “unsolvable” met and welcomed each other with open arms.

(SHOW PICTURE OF CANDLES)

One of the members of a rival gang described the moment as “Amazing.”

“It was beautiful,” he said. Adding, hugging members of his former opponents, was “one of the best feelings of his whole life.”

Another former gang member added, “This is history because they got to stand on the same square, not incarcerated, but on the streets coming together.”

- II. When I read this story, I must admit, I had a few initial thoughts.
 - i. Why did it take so long for these groups to come together?
 - ii. Why did it take a death to create a moment of unity?
 - iii. Once I got past my judgement, I realized – THIS IS MY STORY. THIS IS OUR STORY. THIS IS THE STORY OF BEING HUMAN.
- III. Big questions:
 - a. Why do we languish in pain when peace is possible?
 - b. How often have I been an agent of pain rather than an agent of peace?
 - c. Have you ever been an agent of pain? Agent of peace?
- IV. Personal Story of being agent of pain.

GOD’S MISSION OF PROGRESS v. HUMAN VISION OF PROGRESS

- I. God’s mission was not for pain to be the reality.
 - a. Flood the world with His presence and for us to partner with Him as He floods the world with His presence.
 - b. We see this in the story of Adam and Eve.
 - i. In his book, Reappearing Church, Mark Sayers writes . . .
 1. “The expansion of God’s presence was to progress at God’s pace, as Adam and Eve spread out and brought His glory across the face of the world. The endpoint of history we read in the book of Revelation presents “the entire new heavens and earth to be one mammoth temple in which God dwells.”
 - ii. However, the enemy had other plans.
 1. One of the author’s he quotes says . . .
 - a. “Adam and Eve were created as flesh – limited, weak, vulnerable, touchable, woundable. That was good, very good. They might have accepted their

vulnerability and the precariousness of their fleshly life, trusting the Father to care for them. Adam might have been content to wait for the Lord to pen his hand to satisfy his desires, might have trusted his Father to give him his full inheritance when the Father saw that he was ready. Eve might have rejoiced in fleshly weakness and trusted her Father to supply whatever strength she needed. Instead, they were discontent and impatient. Created good, very good flesh, they wanted to be more, and they wanted to be something more now.”

2. Sayers, reminds us that . . .
 - a. “Through a combination of negligence, disobedience, and impatience with God’s rule, lack of trust, and rebellion, Adam and Eve chose their **human-powered vision of progress**. They risk it all to discover a divine presence within themselves. Cast out of God’s presence, they find nothing, only the taste of bitter fruit.” (Full Page Slide)
 - b. “Their constant companion was no longer God’s presence, but instead shame, anxiety, and isolation.”
- c. Human built systems –
 - i. Systems of progress that produce more pain than peace
 1. Secularism (Lower 1/3 slide with definition)
 - a. Any attempt to create a system for human flourishing in which the presence of God is absent.
 2. Consumerism (Lower 1/3 slide with definition)
 - a. An attempt to create a system that promotes the idea that individuals who consume goods and service in large quantities will be better off.
 3. Rugged Individualism (Lower 1/3 slide with definition)
 - a. An attempt to create a world where an individual is self-reliant and independent of being a part of a community.
 - ii. These human built systems produce the opposite of what we need
 1. They promise progress but produce anxiety.
 - a. These systems are based on a belief that as individuals are given freedoms, individuals will flourish.
 - b. The individual in these systems receives constant messaging from the culture that to be happy and content we need to increase our input of freedom.
 - c. Just buy more stuff
 - d. Just consume more experiences
 - i. Mark Sayers says –
 1. “Our tanks of freedom are overflowing, bursting at the seams, yet our tanks of meaning and the relational are dry and empty.”
 - e. Question – Do you feel this?
 2. Consequences of
 - a. “The output of such a lopsided system is isolation and an increasing mental health crisis of escalating levels of depression and anxiety. The expansion of choice anxiety and information overload has created an endless sense of confusion and lostness, leading many to recoil from making any forward steps, in fear of making the wrong decision. For many, especially in emerging generations, a sense of paralysis has become the norm.” (Full Page Slide)
 - i. Question – Do you feel paralyzed?
 - b. Rather than embracing the freedom that come from following Jesus, we live in the painful reality of the cost of our attempt to follow our individual freedoms and secular systems of the world.

TEXT

- I. Ephesians II: 11-22

- a. As we turn to the text this morning, we are going to read a portion of a letter sent to the church in Ephesus that communicates to a group of people once separated because of their own visions of progress. The letter is a reminder of how that former life affected them and a vision of what their new life could offer.
- b. Audience
 - i. Jews and Gentiles
 - 1. Jews
 - a. Were despised as an oddball people addicted to strange customs as circumcision, Sabbath observance, and food laws, that for instance forbade the eating of port.
 - b. Their worship of a single deity did not endear them to the Greco-Roman world of religious pluralism and tolerance.
 - 2. Gentiles
 - a. Defined as any non-Jewish nation.
 - b. This group was excluded, separated from Christ.
- c. Text
 - i. **READ Ephesians 2:11-22 (Slide with verses in ESV)**
- d. Text Thoughts
 - i. This text reminds the Gentiles that they were
 - 1. Separated from Christ
 - 2. Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel
 - 3. Strangers to the covenants of promise
 - 4. Had no hope
 - 5. Without God in the world
 - ii. Now, because of Jesus, the ones who were far off have now been brought near by the blood of Christ.
- e. When Jesus enters
 - i. He is the peace who made both nations one
 - ii. He broke down the wall of hostility
 - 1. How?
 - a. Abolished the law of the commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, making peace
 - b. He came and preached peace to those who were far off and peace to those who were near
 - iii. The result of Jesus' presence
 - 1. Neither of the Jews or Gentiles are strangers and aliens
 - 2. They are now fellows citizens with the saints and members of the household of God
 - 3. The foundation they are built on is one with Jesus as the cornerstone
 - 4. Now, because of Jesus, they are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

FROM AGENTS OF PAIN TO AGENTS OF PEACE

- I. The passage of scripture outlines the move from being separated from Christ, alienated to being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit
- II. Verse 22
 - a. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit
 - b. Because of God in them, they can move from being hostile, agents of pain to a household of agents of peace.
- III. What is peace?
 - a. PEACE defined as SHALOM through the Prophet Isaiah
 - b. The Hebrew word that Isaiah uses to describe the peace that Jesus brings is SHALOM
 - i. Conveys wholeness, harmony, health
 - c. Where we as humans might settle for just getting along as a definition of peace, shalom represents something way more robust.

- i. Shalom is a transformation of the conditions that lead to war in the first place.
- ii. In her essay, *The Prince of Shalom*, Carolyn Arends states . . .
 - 1. “When there is shalom, everything gets to function the way it was created to. Shalom rejects the idea of life as a zero-sum game and dares to imagine the comprehensive flourishing of every person and everything all at the same time.
- d. Isaiah 35 depicts this wholeness in beautifully poetic language.
 - i. **Read Isaiah 35: 8-10 (Slide with verses from ESV)**
 - 1. **this is a beautiful picture of what it looks like when peace enters the world.**
 - ii. Arends states, “Through this passage, we are offered a vibrant vision of relational, economic, and spiritual wholeness in the depiction of a redeemed people walking and singing together on a highway of holiness.”

WHAT IS POSSIBLE AS AGENTS OF PEACE

- I. “A redeemed people walking and singing together on a highway of holiness.”
 - II. This sounds like a move from Agents of Pain to Agents of Peace
 - III. This is a move from a Household of Hostility ruled by human systems of progress to a Holy Spirit Household Family on Mission ruled by King Jesus whose Kingdom system produces peace, shalom.
 - IV. Because of the blood of Christ, we have the possibility to partner with God in His original plan – to spread His presence throughout the whole world.
 - a. We get to live as agents of peace who take this hope into every space we enter.
 - i. Can you imagine what kind of affect a church could have when it is made up of people who embrace their role as agents of peace?
 - 1. I read one author who said -
 - a. “It is the church . . . as far as cultural life is concerned, (that) bear(s) the burdens of the whole world. Only the Church joins them together into an unbreakable communion and teaches them the norms for all relationships of life, even outside the Church. The church is elected to responsibility, called to be the church to and for the world . . . to serve it by showing what redeemed human community and culture look like, as modeled by the One whose cultural work led him to the cross. In short, we’re sent out to be martyrs, witnesses of the Crucified One. In that way, we win by losing.” (Full page slide)
 - b. James K.A. Smith adds . . .
 - i. “When we were called, we were blessed, now we’re sent, we’re blessed. We are not sent out as orphans, nor are we sent out to prove ourselves.
 - c. Verse 22 reminds us that we . . . “are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”
 - d. We are being sent on mission, no longer as Agents of Pain, but as Agents of Peace, filled with the Spirit with our imaginations fueled by the Word of God to imagine the world differently and to invite the world to join us in partnering with what God is doing.
 - e. This takes courage and it forces us to deal with the consequences and symptoms of our former way of life while confidently living into our new reality. May we be people who embrace the presence of the Lord and live with the joy that comes from being agents of peace.
- V. Final Blessing after Song
 - a. Ephesians 3:14-21 (Full page slide with text from ESV)