

Peace

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[0 : 00] If you have a Bible, then turn with me to the chapter that we have read earlier, and I just want to focus our attention on words that we find in verse 17.

Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 17, I'll just read it for you. He came, that's Jesus, Jesus came and preached.

Jesus came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near. I want to begin this morning by imagining that Jesus is your guest preacher. Over the past 20 months or so, since the vacancy began, you've had a variety of preachers, and they've pretty much all been different, different style, different personality, come from different places.

So you're used to guest preachers. You're just about to end the vacancy so that there'll be some consistency and normality in the pulpit from now on. But you will still, from time to time, have guest preachers.

[1 : 17] People that, I guess, Joe will make use of to bring here so that you can have a change of scenery.

Imagine, and I don't say this with any flippancy, imagine Jesus was the guest preacher. Imagine that.

Now, that's not going to happen because Jesus is at the Father's right hand. But I wonder, as we read this verse, because that's what the verse is about, Jesus the preacher.

That's what it tells us. He came and preached. I wonder what Jesus' preaching would be like. I wonder whether he would raise his voice or whether he would speak with a low voice.

I grew up listening to preachers who typically had a raised voice. That was the style in those days, back in the day. It's not so much the style now, and it certainly isn't the style with your new minister.

[2 : 21] But I suspect that Jesus himself, his voice would not have been so much raised. And I say that, not just because I'm guessing it, but because it actually says it in the Bible.

In Isaiah, he says, he did not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street. I suspect that when Jesus spoke, when he preached, it was in a lower voice.

I could be wrong. Correct me if I'm wrong. I could be wrong. Please feel free to disagree. I don't know whether Jesus would sit or stand.

He may choose to sit and preach, because that's what he did in Galilee on the top of the mountain when he preached on the Mount of Transfiguration. He sat and he spoke to his disciples.

When he was at the Lake of Galilee, he sat and he spoke to the people. He sat from the boat. I don't know whether he would use his hands a lot. I tend to use my hands a lot.

[3 : 26] I don't know whether that's habit. Some preachers do. Some people don't. I don't know what Jesus would do. I don't know what length of sermon it would be. Sometimes when you had a guest preacher, they would ask you, how long should I preach for?

And you tell them, well, maybe 30 minutes, 40 minutes max. You would never say that to Jesus, would you? After all, he can take as long as he wants.

I know this, though, that there would be lots of illustrations and nobody would be bored. And I say that because when Jesus preached, crowds of people came to hear him.

And the common people heard him gladly. And there are plenty of examples in the Gospels where Jesus uses illustration to make his point.

He would have plenty of stories that we could relate to. Imagery like the good shepherd or the prodigal son. All of these were to illustrate the great truths of the Gospel which he came to share with people who needed to hear it.

[4 : 44] I know his preaching would be compelling. I know that there would be nobody falling asleep. Nobody looking at their watches. I know that you would be only too eager to listen to more.

Or at least I suspect so. I know also that he would make no mistake. Sometimes as preachers, we say the wrong thing. We give the wrong impression. And we go home afterwards and we think, I wish I hadn't said that.

I gave the wrong impression. But not so with Jesus. He would always say the right thing. Well, so much for the speculation.

I know from this verse what his theme would be. Now when you think about it, his theme could be a whole variety of things.

I mean, he could stand here and he could tell us when the universe came into existence. He could explain to us what we read in Genesis chapter 1 about God saying, let there be light and let there be the planets and the sun and the moon and so on and so forth.

[5 : 51] How that relates to the molecules, the atoms. Genesis 1 doesn't tell us. It's not a scientific account. You could ask him or you could perhaps expect him because he was there at the time.

But that would not be his theme. Neither would some of the intricate details about God would be his theme. The Trinity, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

Things that we've tried for years to get our heads round. He could tell us all about that, but that would not be his theme.

This verse tells us that his theme would be peace. Let me read it again. He came and preached peace.

That was his subject. That would be the title. I go home sometimes and Ian asks me for what's your sermon title. Sometimes I forget to give it and other people do.

[6 : 54] Because for the website you have a title. And his title would be peace. That's what it tells us here. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

Now when you think about it, this should not surprise you when you go all the way back into the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah again.

When it's predicting the birth of Jesus, it tells us this. To us a child is born. To us a son is given. And the government will be upon his shoulder.

He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and, you know it, Prince of Peace.

And then at the birth of Jesus, you remember what the angels announced to the shepherds. They said, Glory to God in the highest. And on earth, peace among those with whom God is pleased.

[8 : 02] Peace. And then moving on through the ministry of Jesus. As Jesus approached the cross. When he was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he said to his disciples.

Or rather at the Last Supper, he said, Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. So his lasting legacy can be encapsulated.

It can be summed up in this one word, peace. Peace. And after the resurrection, the same is true. Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

And as we make our way further on through the New Testament, this is a word that comes up time and time again. The Apostle Paul is bursting with enthusiasm in his changed life in which he has found forgiveness and reconciliation with God and peace with God.

And this is how he encapsulates it. This is how he puts it. He says, Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 07] Then later on in Philippians chapter 4 and verse 7, he says, And the peace of God that surpasses understanding will guard your minds.

That's how central this word is. So I have no doubt whatsoever. But that's the theme that Jesus would want because that's the theme that Paul tells us in no uncertain terms that Jesus has preached upon.

Now then, I'd like us in the remaining 10 minutes or so to look at this idea of the gospel as peace. And I want to address, of course, those of us who will be sharing in the Lord's Supper later on as believers in Jesus. But I want also to address anyone who is watching or is with us today who isn't a believer.

Because I've become more and more convinced that a communion service is a witness to people who aren't yet believers, who haven't been converted. And I want to make the most of that today.

[10 : 14] I want to make the most of the opportunity in reminding us all of this great message of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because that's what the Lord's Supper is about. We're celebrating what we have found in Jesus Christ. What God has given us. This newness of life.

And what Paul talks about in Romans chapter 5. Therefore, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. So I want us to think about very, very briefly three things. First of all, I want us to ask why do we need his peace?

Why do we need Jesus' peace? And then secondly, I want us to think about what God did specifically to bring about this peace.

And then thirdly, I want us to think about how we can have this peace if we don't have it already. I want us, if we have this peace already, to rejoice in it and to thank God for it by remembering what God has done for us.

[11 : 20] But I want us also to think about how we can have this peace by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Three things then, very, very simply and very, very briefly.

First of all, I want us to think about why we need his peace. And I want to explain this by going back to my speculation before. Imagine that Jesus was going to be the guest preacher.

Imagine the crowd that that would draw. What would your reaction be if it was announced here that Jesus was going to be the guest preacher?

What would it be? My guess is this. I could be wrong, but my guess is this. Your first reaction would be, well, of course, I want to go and hear Jesus. This is a golden opportunity, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hear the Son of God.

Of course, it's a no-brainer. Of course, I'd want to. And yet, hold on a minute. Would that be true for everybody? Would everybody want immediately to be there?

[12 : 28] Because the reason I'm saying is this. Because usually with a preacher, you know, you can go and you can be a spectator. You can hide behind a pillar or you can sort of be anonymous.

You can sit at the back. You can be anonymous. And you know that that person in the pulpit doesn't know anything about you. But this is Jesus who knows everything about you.

This is the Son of God. In the flesh. And he knows who you are. He knows your name. He knows where you live. He knows your background. He even knows your thoughts.

He knows what you struggle with, what your weaknesses are. And he knows where you are with God. He knows every shame. Remember that he is perfect.

The perfect, holy Son of God. I am not sure how I would feel knowing that this Jesus who's looking at me from the pulpit and he knows every single thing that I have done.

[13 : 39] I'm not sure how comfortable I would be. Do you see what I'm saying? You see, there's this uneasiness, isn't there, when it comes to God.

I know I hear, I've heard people saying in the past, ah, you know, they treat God as if he's some kind of just this, this, this, this Santa figure.

Who just is perfectly, it doesn't matter what you've done, he just prepared to ignore the whole thing and just receive everyone. That's not the gospel at all.

God has not ignored what we have done in this world. He has not ignored the lives that we have lived. And he's not prepared to ignore the shame that there is in our lives because of our sinfulness.

And that's the problem, isn't it? And that's what makes the difference between whether you would want to rush to hear Jesus or whether you would rather be a million miles away.

[14 : 47] Because he knows, he's aware of all the dark, shameful secrets that there are in our lives. And he knows even more than we do about them.

That's what makes us so uneasy and squeamish when it comes. And that's, I believe, why so many people, they're disinclined to think about God.

Because it's too painful, it's too uncomfortable for them. And if you're in that position this morning, if you're not a Christian, and I'll explain what the difference between a person like that is and a Christian in a few moments.

Because this is vital. If you're like that this morning and you would feel utterly uneasy if Jesus was to be here knowing everything about you, whatever you do, don't run away.

Because the story's not finished. And that's the mistake that so many people make when they think about their relationship to God. They run away, just like Adam and Eve, remember, before they fell, before they disobeyed.

[15 : 51] Life could not have been more perfect. It was absolutely lovely. The relationship they had with God was a perfect one. And then they disobeyed. And the moment afterwards, their whole

relationship was turned on its head.

So when God came into the garden, they were hiding. Sin. And humankind has been hiding ever since. Because all of a sudden, God was no longer a pleasure to them.

Because he knew what they had done and they felt ashamed. And that's the problem with what the Bible calls sin. It makes us feel, it drives a wedge.

It creates a gap. It creates a chasm between us and God. And nothing that we can do can fill that gap. Or fill the chasm.

The Bible goes on to say that it's even worse than that. Because it's not just the way we feel. The uneasiness the way we feel. We feel that way because there is real anger in God towards our sin.

[16:52] There's no getting away from it, by the way. I know it may not be the picture of God that you prefer to have. But that's the picture that the Bible presents. God cannot react in any other way towards our wrongdoing other than anger.

But when God is angry, he is righteously and properly angry. And the Bible goes on to tell us that our sin brings God's condemnation.

It brings guilt to every one of us. The moment that we're born, we're guilty. And guilt leads to condemnation. You know what happens when you break the law. There are consequences.

It's called punishment. God has said the same. The wages of sin is death. That's the reality of the human condition.

No wonder the word peace is such a strange one. It seems so far away, doesn't it, when I describe it in these terms.

[17:51] But these are the terms that the Bible describes it in. So that's why we need peace. We need peace because there's turmoil between us and God.

There's hostility. There's hostility. There's a gap. There's a separation. There's condemnation. The second thing then, I promised I would say, was what God did about this.

He could have left the world in darkness and in ignorance and condemnation. He could have done that. But he didn't. He did something to bring about our peace by ending the condemnation and the guilt that we all bear.

He did something utterly mind-blowing. He did something which was completely unique. And this is where the gospel comes into its own. This is where the Christian faith, it is not only the best message in the world, it is the only way in which we can be reconciled to God.

And I'll tell you why. Because God himself did something. He didn't assign someone else to do it. He himself did something. And let me tell you, let me try and put it as simply as possible.

[19:14] Some of you will say, well, we've heard all this before. Of course you have. But isn't it good to be reminded of what God has done to bring us together and to change our lives? Of course it is.

God himself took the punishment that we deserve. He himself stood in our place.

Out of his love for the world. That's what John 3.16 is all about. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. So that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Now remember I talked before about the condemnation. We've broken God's law. We're under God's condemnation. We deserve his punishment. We deserve his punishment. Supposing someone else could take that punishment instead of us.

That way, we could be set free from the guilt of our sin. And that's exactly what the gospel is all about.

[20:27] It's exactly what the Christian faith is all about. God did it, first of all, by coming into this world as one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. He was born.

God was born. Imagine that. The creator of the whole universe. And he becomes a tiny baby. That's why Christmas is such a glorious event.

Because we're celebrating. We're celebrating the incarnation. The coming of God. Not just God visiting. Not just God speaking. But God actually entering into this world as one of us.

And growing up as a child. And becoming a man. And a real human being. And the reason he did that. Was so that one day. He would take our place.

And suffer the punishment and the anger of God. In himself. Instead of us. Jesus' death on the cross.

[21 : 34] Is the key event. That brings our salvation. That brings God's rescue plan to us. God's remedy.

And because Jesus became guilty on the cross. Of our sin. Then we. Are set free.
God's the only one who has the power to. Take our guilt. And to wipe it clean. To wash it. To completely. Purify.

Us. Only because Jesus. Has taken our punishment. In himself. On the cross.
So the last question then is. How can we have. This peace. We simply take it. Because it is God's gift.

[22 : 33] To those. Who ask. And that's again. Where so many people get it wrong. They think of. Religion. As something they have to do. For God. We have to try.

And live a better life. That's not the message. Of the gospel. We have to try. And go to church more often. That's not the message. Of the gospel. We have to try. And watch our language.
Or watch our behavior. Or watch the way. That I speak to my wife. Or my husband. Or my family. Or my work colleagues. I have to try. And be a better person. That's. The way. That so many people. Understand. That's not. What the message. Of the gospel is. The more you try. The more entrenched. You become. In your own guilt. And your own darkness. Remember. That God has to rescue us.

And he did this. In Jesus Christ. And today. Jesus preaching. When he preaches.

[23 : 33] Peace to us. That's a peace. That he offers. To us. And he says. Take it. I am giving it.

To you. He has died. Died on the cross. In order. To purchase. This peace. For us. And he is. Offering it. To everyone. Remember what we sang.

Into God. Be the glory. That's why you probably saw me. Noting it down. Because it just suddenly struck me. That line. In the hymn that we sang. The vilest offender. So it doesn't matter.

Who you are. You might think. That you are a no-hoper. That you've lived too long. In the world. There is no hope. There's no rescue for you. That God has given up. On you years ago. You're wrong.

You might say to me. Well you don't know my history. You don't know my life. You don't know. You talk about the darkness. And the shameful things. If you only knew. Then you wouldn't even. You wouldn't have anything.

[24 : 30] To say to me. No. But Jesus does. He came. And he preached peace. The vilest offender.

Who truly believes. That moment. From Jesus. A pardon. Receives. Isn't that wonderful?

That moment. From Jesus. A pardon. Receives. And it's because of that. Grace of God.

That. Indescribable. Kindness of God. That none of us. Have deserved. That we are here today. To remember. What Jesus did for us.

In taking our place. On the cross. And in becoming. Guilty. For us. And in. Being willing. Because of his love. For us.

[25 : 28] Being willing. To take. The wrath. The anger. Of God. On himself. In all his fury. And it is because.

Jesus died. That. This gospel. Is for you. Whoever you are. You may not. Have come to faith.

In Jesus. Yet. This gospel. Is for you. You may be just watching. This service. Listening to what is said. This message. Is for you.

This offer. God's offer. God's invitation. To come. To take it. To turn away. From all of the badness. In your life. And to trust. In Jesus. To surrender. Once and for all. To him. Who loved us.

[26 : 25] And gave. Himself. For us. Our father in heaven. We pray. That as we now. Come to. Remembering.

Jesus death. In that. Particular way. That he. Has given. And commanded. His disciples. We pray. That you will. Fill our hearts. With thankfulness.

For what. Jesus has done. For us. In dying. On the cross. And we pray. That you will. Give us that. Peace with God. That you have.

Purchased for us. We pray. That there will be. A sense of that. Peace. In our service. Today. And in all of our. Hearts. As we yield. Ourselves.

Alone. To Jesus Christ. And what he has done. In his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[27 : 18] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.