

“A Glimpse of Heaven on Earth”

Ephesians 2:11-22

Corrie ten Boom and her sister Betsie were captured by the Germans during WWII because they hid Jewish people in their father's home in the Netherlands. Being sentenced to Ravensbruck, they suffered from disease, starvation and of course beatings and humiliation. Her sister Betsie would die in Ravensbruck but she always told Corrie that we must forgive those who hurt us just as our Lord forgave all who rejected Him.

After the war Corrie wrote books and spoke at churches and gatherings where she would share this message of forgiveness. Once while speaking the message of forgiveness in a church in Munich Germany, Corrie was approached by a man after the service. Quoting from her biography *A Tramp for the Lord*:

At the close of the service, a balding man in a gray overcoat stepped forward to greet her. Corrie froze. She knew this man well; he'd been one of the most vicious guards at Ravensbrück, one who had mocked the women prisoners as they showered.

And now he was pushing his hand out to shake hers, and saying:

“A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course — how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and I was face to face with one of my captors, and my blood seemed to freeze.

“You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk,” he was saying. “I was a guard there... But since that time, I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein” — again the hand came out — “will you forgive me?”

The soldier stood there expectantly, waiting for Corrie to shake his hand. She “wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it — I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us.”

Corrie remembered that forgiveness is an act of the will — not an emotion. “Jesus, help me!” she prayed. “I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.” Corrie thrust out her hand.

And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. “I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart.”

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then. But even so, I realized it was not my love. I had tried, and did not have the power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit.

Individual salvation leads to corporate restoration. This is what Paul aims at in Eph. 2. Back in Ch.1 Paul said we are blessed in the heavens because God has chosen us before the foundation of the world, to respond to the gospel. We are forgiven, chosen and sealed. With that comes

the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, (1:19-20)

Resurrection power is life-giving power to that which formerly was dead. In Eph. 2:1-10 Paul reminds us that formerly we were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins “But God” (2:4-5) who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ, saving us by His grace. 2:1-10 are all about the wonderful truths about how God saved us (2:1-10). Ch. 2:11-22 begins with “therefore” meaning 2:11-22 is the reason why God saved us. So as Paul begins to explain to gentile believers why he joined them together in the body of Christ with Jewish believers (former enemies as we’ll see) he reminds all of them,

All God’s People Have been Brought Near Through Christ by God’s Grace (2:11-13)

Back in 2:3 Paul assured them

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ

And now he’s going to focus on the miraculous resurrection power that brings Gentiles and Jews (Paul being a Jew) together who are in Christ. Again, because we’re in the middle of a passage of Scripture we have to make sure we understand the overall context and not think he’s only talking to Gentiles here. The Gentiles of course were looked down on by the “So-called circumcision” But these were Jews who arrogantly thought their ethnicity made them right with God. Paul says we’re all on the same playing field. We’ve all been saved by grace

Both the unprivileged and the privileged (v.11-12)

To the Gentiles Paul says,

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

The nation of Israel are not automatically saved. God made promises that still stand for the nation of Israel but only the saved Jews will receive those promises and experience the return of the Messiah to the land who will rule for 1000 years. God chose them as the people through whom He would fulfil His covenant promises which were promises of hope through the Messiah. They were privileged because they by God’s grace had the advantage of hearing about them first and seeing God work miracles in their own lives getting them out of Egypt and then later out of Babylon. The Gentiles were dis-advantaged because they weren’t included in these promises to the nation except for the promise to Abraham that God would bless the nations through his descendent.

Many Jews did not trust God’s promises and anyone who doesn’t believe in God’s promises

Are equally without hope because of unbelief (vv.12-13)

Without hope and without God describes anyone prior to coming to faith in Jesus, Jew and Gentile. In the next verse Paul will say Jesus is “our peace” and v.17 that He preached peace to those who were far and were near. The near being the Jews who still were without hope and without God because they had yet to accept Christ. But because the Law and the privilege of having the message first many felt they were right with God and the Gentiles were not.

And this is what Paul wants to focus on; the miraculous, resurrection power that brings the two together as ‘one new man’ or a new temple. This is the miracle of the power of the cross. That former enemies can come together in peace because they both accept the gospel by grace and understand neither of them are saved without grace through the shed blood of Jesus. To see former enemies working and serving together in love and peace is a glimpse of heaven on earth. What will eternity have? Human beings from every tribe, tongue, colour and ethnicity all united and living in joy together because of Jesus. This is the goal of salvation; not just to get us to heaven when we die (that’s the future aspect of our salvation) but for the present ...

To Create a Community of Peace **(2:14-17)**

How did God do that then and how is He doing it now?

By removing that which divides us (vv.14-15a)

What was the issue between Jew and Gentile in Paul’s day?

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 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, ¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

The Jews despised the Gentiles because they had the Law and the Gentiles did not live by it. The Law became an idol, an object to put your confidence in. The Gentiles had little desire to obey all those rules and rituals. A few did. A few became proselytes and some even underwent circumcision but they were never full Jews. Twice Paul called this issue ‘hostility’, the barrier, the dividing wall. The Jews thought it was the standard by which you could reach God with – which it was not. The Law was designed to teach you how to maintain your relationship with God; that was always established by faith. Your forgiveness was maintained through sacrifice. Once Jesus died He fulfilled the Law, making it no longer valid and necessary to make sacrifices to maintain your relationship with God. That put the playing ground on the same level. Now it’s about Jesus and Jesus died so anyone could come near to God through Him by faith.

This is how you settle arguments and deal with conflict. You identify the issue that causes hostility – an insult, a hurtful act, a forgotten appointment – and you render it powerless by confessing your sin and asking forgiveness. Once you do that you render the offense null and void. It’s no longer the dividing issue. As Corrie ten Boom showed us, our sin nature wants to keep the offense alive, to keep the issue of hostility continually as an issue that you give power to because you hang on to it as proof you’ve been hurt and you hold it over someone else. You may not be at peace with someone right now – even a Christian – because you’re not willing to remove the item that divides you. If we act like that as believers, then we’re sure not giving the unsaved a glimpse of heaven now. That our

citizenship is actually in heaven. Instead we look like any other human being who holds a grudge against someone else.

How else do we create a community of peace? Get rid of what separates us and be

United by our shared purpose (v.15b)

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,

Himself, being Jesus, wants all believers to have the same purpose; to be in Christ. To live like and look like we belong to Jesus no matter how we differ. Actually working with our diversity for the common purpose of the gospel. The word “peace” appears 4 times in these 4 verses. He is our peace. He created the church to be a united message of peace by preaching peace to both groups. That’s what a mediator does. He speaks to all aggrieved parties who are divided over an issue. Jesus is the issue we unite about. When we have difference we deal with the dividing issue and come together through the uniting issue, Jesus.

Because Jesus now gives us peace with God we can have peace in our circumstances:

¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all. [2 Thes. 3:16]

And peace with one another. In Rom. 12:16 Paul writes

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. [Rom. 12:16-18]

If we are at peace with God through Jesus, that peace should exist amongst each other. We will live in perfect peace in eternity one day, so to live at peace with each other gives our unsaved friends a glimpse of what heaven will be like. Especially when they see people who formerly didn’t get along but now do, all because of Jesus. This is how Paul concludes Ch. 2 with this goal:

¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

When we live at peace with others believers we

Show the World God Dwells with us **(2:18-22)**

How will we best do that? We’ll do that as Paul shows us here

As we spiritually mature (vv.18-20)

Biblical unity doesn’t happen overnight. We read Acts and we see that the early church struggled with this new man, Jew and Gentile. It gradually happens as we mature and grow in the Word. We do that through prayer:

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

If we both have access to God through prayer, then let's pray and ask God for wisdom and grace to serve with each other, praying for humility and a servant attitude and understanding when we need to settle differences and disputes. We are fellow citizens and fellow members of God's household, built on the foundation of truth affirmed by the apostles and New Testament prophets on the cornerstone truth as taught by Jesus. We all have the same Bible. Sometimes we differ on understanding it and applying it, but we are rooted in Jesus and equal parts of the building that God is growing us to be. If we continue to grow spiritually by praying to God (and even with each other – try staying upset at someone while praying with them!) and staying in His Word then we will grow together because we're both listening to Jesus and the Spirit will speak to those areas in our life we need to deal with.

Because what are we being built into? Into a temple of the Lord. The temple was the place where God's presence dwelt and His people served him and worshipped Him together. Priests had roles, Levites had roles, the High priest had a role – but all for the same purpose. So the world will know God dwells with us

As we serve together (vv.21-22)

Not just here but also with our Christian family in the broader community where we live. God is building us up together as the place where His presence dwells (His Spirit) so that the world sees a glimpse of heaven on earth and want to know how they can be a part of it. But if we refuse to forgive or fellowship or serve because of conflict then why would others want to hear about Jesus?

Think back to the Corrie ten Boom illustration. Is there someone in your own life (a believer) that has hurt you and if they were to stretch out their hand in forgiveness would you accept it? If you won't, why not? Because they hurt you more than we've hurt Jesus? We hurt Jesus everyday, I'm guessing many times without even confessing we sinned. He took on all our sins even while we were sinners.

If we struggle with forgiving those who've hurt us, then I think it's only logical to say that it's because we're not growing in Christlikeness. We may pray and even read our Bibles but we're not acting on what it says. We're not allowing the full peace of Christ to rule in our hearts. Let's close with Paul's words in Col. 3:15-17,

Col. 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Citizens of heaven should live like we're from there and are going there. Let's give our unsaved family members and friends not just a glimpse of eternity by the way we live individually but a taste of heaven as we demonstrate Jesus' love and peace together.

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If you have any comments or questions about this sermon please contact us at olivet@rideau.net