

“Historic Peace Agreement”

2 Kings 5:1-17 • Ephesians 2:8-22

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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For the last 72 years, 8 months, and 3 weeks, Korea has officially been at war with itself, North against South. The fighting began in 1950 when North Korea invaded the South and it ended in 1953 with an armistice, which is just an agreement between the two sides to stop fighting for a while. But those 3 years devastated both sides and the effects have rippled around the world as the two sides have remained extremely divided with almost no contact between the North and South.

But then an amazing thing happened a couple of weeks ago. The South Korean President and the North Korean dictator met at the border to talk about peace. I don't know whether they will actually come to an agreement that brings peace to all of Korea but just the fact that they are having the discussions is pretty amazing and signals the possibility of peace for the first time in many years.

For 72 years people have studied and discussed and written about the reasons that Korea remains divided. For even longer than that people have tried to figure out why the Middle East is so divided, and that Longhorns and Aggies are so divided, and that families can be so divided. But ultimately what divides people and nations from each other is sin.

Sin separates us from God. Ephesians 2:12 says, “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” That's a pretty bleak picture. In fact Paul goes on in verse 16 to describe it as “hostility” between us and God. Apart from Christ we are at war with God and we are unable to stop. We don't have the ability to negotiate peace.

That's where Jesus comes in. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the

dividing wall of hostility.” Jesus' death and resurrection brings peace between us and God and between us and others. He breaks down the wall of hostility.

Paul is referring to an actual wall to make his point. The Temple in Jerusalem was surrounded by several courtyards. The first one, the one closest to the Temple itself, was called the Court of the Priests. Only temple priests were permitted inside this area. Surrounding the Court of the Priests was the Court of Israel, which could be entered by any male Jew. Around the Court of Israel was one known as the Court of the Women, which was as close to the Temple as Jewish women could get. All of these were on the same level. But outside the Court of the Women and down five steps was a stone wall about five feet high that went all the way around the Temple area, and another 14 steps below that wall was a large courtyard called the Court of the Gentiles. This was as close to the Temple as Gentiles could come. In fact, archaeologists have discovered stone inscriptions that were on the wall that read, “No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and embankment around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which follows.” That's a pretty serious “keep out” sign.

Paul wrote Ephesians while in prison in Rome. The reason he was in prison was because he was accused by the Jews of bringing a Gentile from Ephesus into the Temple courts, into the Court of Israel. So he understood the separation that the wall symbolized. But he was also referring to a greater separation, inside the Temple itself. The Temple was divided into two sections. There was the Holy Place, where only priests could go, and then there was the Holy of Holies, the place where the Ark of the Covenant was, the place where God was. Only a priest could enter the Holy of Holies and only once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people. Between the two chambers was a

woven curtain that was nearly 6 inches thick, symbolizing the divide between God and humans.

But you will recall from Matthew 27 that at the moment of Jesus' death on the cross, that curtain was torn in half from top to bottom, symbolizing that our sin is no longer a barrier between us and God. As verse 16 says, Jesus reconciled us to God through the cross. The result is that we now have direct access to God. Paul writes, "Through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father." You can talk to God directly in prayer, confessing and asking Him to act. We can gather to worship and don't need an intermediary.

But that doesn't mean we don't need the Church. In fact, this passage is all about the Church. Paul uses three biblical images to describe the church and how it should function. The first image is of the Church as an agent of God's Kingdom. Verse 19 says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints." Jesus spoke a lot about the Kingdom of God. The first words Jesus is recorded as saying in the Gospel of Mark are, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

The Kingdom of God is essentially anywhere that God rules. When we say the Lord's Prayer we pray, "thy Kingdom come." The next line tells us what that means, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We're praying that God's rule and reign would be as evident here as it is in heaven. Today's passage shows us that when we are united with Christ that our citizenship is transferred. We go from "aliens and strangers" to "fellow citizens." This has serious implications. Because now Jew and Gentile, male and female, young and old, rich and poor, are all equal in God's Kingdom. As fellow citizens, we the Church need to demonstrate this reality to the world.

The second image Paul uses is family. He writes, "you are...members of the household of God." There are two ways to become a member of a family. You are either born into it or

adopted. The Bible uses both to describe Christians. We've talked about this in the past so let me just refresh your memory. You don't GO to church, just like you wouldn't say you go to family. In a family you are loved and cared for and you also love and care for other members of the family. According to Paul the Church is to work the same way.

Third, Paul says that the Church is God's Temple, His dwelling place. He's not referring to the building. God never could be contained in a building. The Temple of God is now His people. The family of God is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." It's important to note that the word "you" is plural in this whole passage. *Y'all* are being built together into a dwelling place for God. And that brings us back to verse 10. "We are his workmanship."

So what does this mean for us today? First of all, the Church is God's creation and He loves His church. In other places in the New Testament the Church is described as the bride of Christ and as the body of Christ. Sometimes people will say something like, "I like Jesus but I don't care for the Church." Sorry, it's a package deal. You can't love Jesus but dislike His body. As God's Temple, the church is being built by God. Second, you and I are like the stones used to build the Temple. God chooses us and shapes us for our position and every believer has a role in the Church. Third, the foundation on which the church is built is "the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." The phrase "apostles and prophets" is a way of referring to the Scriptures, the New and Old Testaments, which all point to Jesus. In other words, the Church only stands when it's built on the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And finally, as the church, as members of the God's church, we are to be in the business

of reconciliation and peace. This begins by us demonstrating peace and reconciliation with one another to the world that's watching. Who are you in conflict with in your life? Where do you need to begin the process of reconciliation? Next it means we work wherever we encounter separation in our community and around the world. Where do we find people separated in

our city? How can we help to bring them together? But most importantly, we point people to Christ who is the only source of peace and hope because just as he has done for you, Jesus brings people who are far from God into his Kingdom, his family, his Temple, the Church.

Amen.