

Kingdom Family Peace

Ephesians 2:17

We've been studying the Kingdom of God.

The big shift we see in Ephesians 2 is that: **The Kingdom of God looks like family.**

- There are some REAL barriers that divide and separate people...
 - Race and ethnicity, economics, age, Politics...
- To bring people together as a family, God needs to transform hearts and deal with things that separate us.

Last week we studied Paul's statement that Jesus puts to death "hostility between people". ...That Jesus reconciles people to God AND He reconciles people to one another.

Today we continue in this passage, and we see a picture of "KINGDOM FAMILY PEACE"

Ephesians 2:16-17 (NLT)

Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near.

Last week we saw Paul speaking about the hostility that existed between Jews & Gentiles.

- Unfortunately in our modern world we see the same sort of hostility.

In fact, sin and hostility is alive and well in our world.

Athanasius was one of the greatest writers and thinkers in the early church.

- Born less than 300 years after Jesus' crucifixion.
- **Athanasius was an African man.**
- Physical description of him: "Short with black tightly curled coarse hair and very dark skin."
- Here is a common picture of Athanasius:
- ****SHOW 1st PICTURE****
- Here is an image that I think probably more accurately represents the man:
- ****SHOW 2nd PICTURE****

Despite the contemporary, historical, physical description, Athanasius has been depicted since the time of Medieval art and in modern times as a **TALL, SLENDER, OLDER and VERY WHITE man...**

- Clearly, hostility between people has always been an issue in the Church...

Athanasius marveled over the depths of God's love.

He spent his life pondering the incredible depths to which Jesus went to save humanity.

1,700 years ago Athanasius marveled over the depth God was willing to go to save us and unite us.

"Jesus became what we are so that we might become what He is [...] If the Lord's death is the ransom of all, and by His death the wall of separation is broken down, and the calling of all the nations is brought about, how would He have called us to Him had not He been crucified? For it is only on a cross that a man dies with his hands spread out. Whence, it was fitting for the Lord to bear this also and to spread out His hands, that with the one He might draw the ancient people: the Jews, and with the other from the Gentiles, and unite both in Himself." – Athanasius, "On Incarnation of the Word", AD 325-376.

God didn't save us by simply lower the standard for humanity and then give us a pat on the back and encourage us to "try harder"...

- Jesus stepped out of heaven to sacrifice Himself in order to completely save us.
- And Jesus didn't just die to remove the barrier of sin that separates every person from God.
- He rose from the grave and invites humanity to rise from the graves of our dead lives too!

God removed the barriers to relationship with Him when Jesus paid the penalty for our sin on the cross.

- Once the "sin barrier" is removed we are welcome to be IN HIM.

And it is IN JESUS where we experience peace...

- Peace with God, and peace with one another—Jesus is our peace.

In v16 Paul uses the term, "reconciliation"—WE—as in BOTH PARTIES—WE have been reconciled to God through the cross.

Reconciliation means that two opposing parties are now brought together and united.

Normally we think of reconciliation as between God and man...

- And we are...our sin is forgiven and we are reconciled to God.
- Because of the cross we can now be in right relationship with God.

But here we are reminded that:

The reconciliation of the cross doesn't stop when our relationship with God is reconciled. This reconciliation also extends to relationship with people around us.

Jesus reconciles us both VERTICALLY with God and HORIZONTALLY with others.

- As Athanasius points out that Jesus dies with his hands outstretched as if to physically reach out His hands to TWO peoples needing to be reconciled to God AND to one another.

JESUS is the catalyst for relational and racial reconciliation.

Samuel Njuguna, an African theologian from Kenya has a interesting insight into this passage:

"Jesus has a cure for the evils of racism, tribalism, and divided humanity. In Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles are one. They have become a new community, the Church. What made this possible was the atoning work of Jesus on the cross which destroyed their enmity and brought reconciliation and peace." — Samuel Njuguna

We've seen in last week's passage that Jesus tears down dividing walls...

- That He has *already* done the work needed to reconcile divided peoples.

And Paul is saying that the peace that Jesus brings is something that ALREADY EXISTS.

Ephesians 2:17 (NLT)

He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near.

- Jesus has already made peace FOR US to walk in with one another through the cross.

The Kingdom of God is like family... and God's family is a family of PEACE.

- The Father is the king of peace.
 - He rules and reigns in peace.
 - He makes peace with rebels and foreigners.
 - He brings people to Him in peace.
 - He brings people together in peace.
 - He brings husbands and wives together in peace.

EVEN ENEMIES are bought together in peace.

Paul says that Jesus reconciles Jews and Gentiles.

- You don't get more far apart than those 2 groups.
- To say that Jews and Gentiles hated one another would be an understatement...

Here we see Jesus bring BOTH Jew and Gentile together...

—not to simply grit their teeth and tolerate one another—

...but brings them together in PEACE.

- PEACE with God.
- PEACE with one another.

True peace comes FROM Jesus, exists IN Jesus, and is maintained BY Jesus.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NASB)

"...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

He says PRESERVE it—HOLD ONTO IT...

He is telling them to maintain this peace not try and ATTAIN it.

- Jesus is their peace, so remain IN him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor in Germany during the Holocaust, and he was one of the very few Germans who stood up to Hitler and defended the Jews.

"Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize, it is a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate."—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer understood our passage...

- **We don't have to strive to discover reconciliation—Jesus has already achieved that.**
- We WALK IN Jesus' finished work of reconciliation and peace.
- We participate in HIS work of peace.

What Paul is teaching to the church in Ephesians chapter 2 is seen as a story in Galatians Ch 2. Galatians 2 records an account of Paul confronting Peter over discrimination in the early Church.

- Peter had been shown a vision by the Lord in Acts ch 10.
 - This vision showed him that salvation was not just for the Jews but also the Gentiles.
 - In this vision, God called Peter to this work of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles.
 - God told Peter to no longer call UNCLEAN that which God has called CLEAN.
 - And Peter obeyed God and was walking in God's plan to reach every nation with the good news of salvation—not just the Jews.

But then something happened...

- Peter was obeying God by being with the Jews AND the Gentiles...
- But a group off Jews showed up and Peter became insecure and started falling back into his old life of excluding non-Jews...He wouldn't eat with them.

In Galatians 2 Paul confronts Peter face-to-face.

Here's what Paul DOESN'T say to Peter—he DOESN'T say, *"Hey Peter stop being racist. God doesn't like racists, and he doesn't like us to act racist, so you need to please God by stopping your racist behavior."*

Paul DOES tell Peter that his behavior is not in step with the Gospel.

- He reminds Peter that Jesus removed the walls that divide people groups.
- He reminds Peter that Jesus fulfilled the law PERFECTLY on our behalf.
- He points Peter back to his NEW LIFE in Jesus, and encourages him to walk IN Jesus.
 - Walk as a child of God!
- “Remember, Peter, that you’re a Kingdom Kid! Don’t forget and go back to living like you did before you were set free and made at peace by Jesus.”
- Kingdom Kids live in the King’s Kingdom, and the King is a King of PEACE!
- The Kingdom of God is like FAMILY, Peter!
- You’ve run back to the orphanage where you’re trying to impress other people so you can feel a sense of belonging...
- **Come back to your place at God’s Kingdom Family table!!**

This is a truth that we need to walk in, Church.
Last week we looked back at verse 10:

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

We are God’s workmanship—GOD’S creation.

- We were purposefully made...

God lovingly made us and has made us new in Jesus so that we can be with Him and walk in the good things that He has invited us into.

Relational and racial reconciliation are two of these good works which God has prepared for us to walk in.

God has created this new work of peace and has invited us to walk in peace.

- We’re invited to walk in what he has secured in the past and has guaranteed for the future.
- **In Jesus we are FAMILY—now and forever!**

In Revelation 5 we see a picture of this eternal peace as all of heaven worships Jesus saying:

Revelation 5:9-12 (NLT)

“You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it.

For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God.”

This is our future—a multi-ethnic people brought together in PEACE in Jesus.

The Church today is supposed to be a sneak-peek at the coming kingdom of God!

- Jesus taught us to pray into this—that the Church would LOOK like heaven:

Matthew 6:9-10 (NASB)

“Pray, then, in this way:

‘Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

‘Let your kingdom come. Let your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Revelation 5 DESCRIBES the diversity in heaven!

- We are part of the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of God looks like a diverse FAMILY.

When the church walks in unity—unity between former enemies, racial unity, age diversity, economic diversity...

Christian unity is a picture, for all the world to see, of the love and redeeming power of God and of the peace that Jesus brings.

- *Jesus has already won this peace and has invited us to walk in a unity that He has created.*

This requires a deliberate pursuit of peace between differing peoples.

- We do not have the option to “opt out” of peace with people different from us.

God is so passionate about bringing racial, age and economic peace that He sent His son to die in order to achieve it.

- If God is passionate about this, then it should be our passion as well.

Kingdom Family Peace comes when we embody the Kingdom Family of God.

- We ARE the Family of God!
- We are to be a DIVERSE family.
- We are to be a family AT PEACE.

This is not an easy thing that comes natural to us...

Living in peace together as a diverse Kingdom Family is not going to come from one sermon or one event...

Living into this peace in Jesus requires us living out a NEW Kingdom Family culture that is committed to following Jesus together—beyond our comfort zones...

As a church we want to live out who God created us to be.

We want to live out of a place of peace—together:

- with former enemies
- as a racially diverse people
- an economically diverse group
- an age diverse people

Let's reach out together to every nation, race, tribe, people group as God's Kingdom Family.

Jesus not only creates a heart of peace in us, JESUS IS OUR PEACE.

- This means that in Jesus I am free to love and engage in relationship with former enemies.
- In Jesus I am able to bless and serve people who are different from me.
- In Jesus we are able to invest in foreigners, the poor, the disabled, people much older than us...

Jesus doesn't just want to keep us close, Christian...

- He wants to reach the lost and the broken and the poor and the hopeless and hostile...
- He wants us to join Him in reaching Ventura County and LA County and Mexico and Africa and the Muslim world...

Jesus wants to bring peace to divided peoples by bringing peace to every person.

- **He wants His diverse Church to reach ALL NATIONS with His peace.**

- You might be thinking, “Generations have tried to unite the racial divide in the US... what makes us different?”

Nothing makes us different!

- We are the same broken, confused people that have gone before us...

Thankfully our hope is NOT in us—in fact, it has nothing to do with us—Our hope is in JESUS. Jesus is our peace!

Ephesians 2:17 (NLT)

He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near.

- Jesus is peace for those near AND to those who are far.

What does this look like for us??

- What is going to move this forward are relationships.
- **There are 2 crucial parts to this move of God in the Church:**

1. **Receive**
2. **Respond**

1. Receive.

• It is vital that each of us RECEIVE God's love in Jesus and live from a place of intimacy with God. Jesus has removed the barriers of hostility that exist between humanity and God by conquering sin on the cross.

- We now have unlimited access to God the Father.
- We are Kingdom Kids in God's household!

God created us to know Him and be with Him, and through our faith in Jesus we are able to live from that place of knowing God and intimacy with God.

- Our new lives in Jesus are lived WITH GOD—as Kingdom Kids.

2. Respond.

- As God's Kingdom Kids, we must RESPOND to others in love by walking in peace.
 - The dividing wall of hostility between people was destroyed by Jesus on the cross.
 - This means that the sin that separates people has been defeated by Jesus.
 - This means that there is REAL peace and REAL reconciliation in Jesus for broken families and hopeless-feeling marriages...
 - Jesus removes the lust that separates good, Godly relationships between men and women.
 - Fear and hatred of other races has been defeated by Jesus.
 - Hurt and distrust of others has been defeated by Jesus.

In Christ we now live as Kingdom Kids in God's Kingdom...

- **And the Kingdom of God looks like FAMILY!**

These Kingdom Family relationships may be outside of our comfort zone.

Jesus' peace extends beyond your safety zone...

- Jesus' peace transcends culture, nationality, race, economic divide, age differences...
- **Our Father is calling us into DIVERSE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS!**

The nearness and far-ness that God's peace reaches indicates that we are to be open to new, different, potentially uncomfortable friendships.

God has created humanity as a DIVERSE people and He is calling a DIVERSE people to Himself.

- God is bringing ALL PEOPLES—not just “our people”—into His church!
- God may be calling you into Kingdom Family relationship with difficult people—people with whom you are naturally at-odds...
- God might be calling us into new relationships with unfamiliar people or people groups...
- This means God might be calling you to step into unfamiliar and uncomfortable new friendships.

Many families in our church have adopted children of different ethnicities and nations.

- Even my family is racially diverse, but we are unified—WE ARE A FAMILY.

- This is an appropriate example as we try to picture God's plan for the Church...

This is what God does, He adopts children—near and far—into His family.

- It is the reality of FAMILY that unites my diverse family.
- It is the reality of FAMILY that unites the Church—**We are a Kingdom Family in Jesus.**

It has been said:

"If you want to travel quickly then go alone, if you want to travel far then go together."—African Proverb

The Church is ALL ABOUT going together—WITH JESUS.

We must be diligent to follow Jesus—TOGETHER—AS A FAMILY

Church, this is GOOD NEWS!!

- It is good news that Jesus has entered into the mess of racism and nationalism...
- It is good news that there is REAL HOPE for REAL PEACE between ALL PEOPLES.
- It is good news that Jesus has torn down the dividing wall of hostility between people.

This is GOOD NEWS because while the church may be shrinking in the US and Europe, it is EXPLODING in Africa and Asia.

- There are more Christians in Africa than there are *people* in the US! (over 400m)

God IS building His Church and bringing peace, and His work IS as diverse as the people He created.

- He is bringing broken, rebellious, offensive, hurt, fearful, lonely, arrogant people of all races and ages and economic profiles...
 - He is bringing these people TO HIMSELF...
- ...AND He is bringing these people into His Church to be with us as KINGDOM FAMILY.

If you have not yet made peace with God, then now is the time—today is the day!

Jesus IS our peace—both peace with God and peace with others.

Maybe you've made peace with God through faith in Jesus—you're a Christian...

- BUT you need to make peace with someone in your life...

Let today be a day of PEACE in Jesus for your family and for God's Kingdom Family.

Communion

One universal truth about families—throughout the world and throughout history—is that families gather together at tables and share meals together.

- And we are going to share bread and juice as Jesus commanded us to do when we gather.

God has made peace with us and invited us to the Family table IN JESUS—THROUGH JESUS.

- If you have not made peace with God IN JESUS, then this meal is not for you.
- If you have not made peace with a Christian brother or sister, this meal is not for you.
- **WHO DO YOU NEED TO RECONCILE WITH & BE BROUGHT INTO JESUS' PEACE?**

Bread...

Matthew 26:26

Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

Cup...

Matthew 26:27-28

Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Benediction:

Revelation 7

I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, “Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!”

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God. They sang,

“Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and strength belong to our God
forever and ever! Amen.”

Let God’s Kingdom Family on earth—His Church—be as it is in heaven !

Matthew 6:9-13 (NKJV)

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.