

The Secret to Having Peace

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The Cross
Ephesians 2:11-18

This morning I am going to finish up our summer series on the Cross by taking a look at the peace that Jesus achieved for us at the Cross. In order to appreciate what Christ has done for us at the cross, we always have to come back to what the need was for at the cross. We don't fully appreciate the cure, as I told you last week, unless we understand the severity and reality of the diagnosis. It is hard to be thrilled about the cross and to do what Paul said he did, which was to "glory in the cross" unless we understand what the cross has achieved. In Galatians 6, the apostle Paul says, "God forbid that I should boast, save in the cross of Christ Jesus." God forbid that I would be excited about, proud about, anything other than the cross. Why was that? What is so marvelous about the cross? And one of the things that Paul was most proud of regarding the cross, the most excited about and loved to tell the story regarding is how the cross makes peace.

To appreciate the cross fully, then, we have to consider the fact that our world desperately needs peace. Is it not the case that we live in a world that is wracked by divisions, a world that desperately needs peace? Imagine flying in an airplane over the continents and nations of the world and looking down as you flew. Would we not see in every region of the world ethnic divisions, class divisions, religious divisions and gender divisions, geographic and regional divisions?

Let's start in the United Kingdom and we see a 200 year war going on between the Irish and the English. Apart from the bombings and pitch battles in the streets of Northern Ireland, one of the things that have surprised me as I have traveled back and forth to the United Kingdom is how many other divisions there are in their country. People in the North don't like people in the South. The lower classes resent the upper classes. The Welsh don't like the English. The Scots don't like the English. The Irish don't like the English. The English think they are superior to everyone else.

If we go to the European continent, there has been a guerrilla war being fought by the Basque separatists against the Spanish government. Of course, there is the massive ethnic war happening in the former Yugoslavia between the Bosnian Serbs and the Croats and Muslims. There is a war being fought right now between the Chechnyans and the Russians. The Greeks and Turks have fought for a millennium.

All through the Middle East we see attacks by Islamic fundamentalists on governments. Throughout the African continent, there is guerrilla warfare. There is hostility between India and Pakistan. Northern Indians don't like Southern Indians. Southern Indians believe Northern Indians are dishonest, lazy, stuck-up. There has been guerrilla fighting in the Philippines for hundreds of years.

Close to home, we have bombings of buildings, bombings in public places, bombings of jets, profound racial divisions. Divisions between men and women. Political divisions. Clashes over abortion. Clashes over economics. Clashes over

welfare. Clashes over the environment. Clashes even over animal rights. We can't even decide how many of our furry little friends we are going to allow to live.

Now let's bring the camera into your workplaces. Consider the amount of gossip that goes on in your workplace, the office politics, the strain in people's relationships, the competition between your workplace and another workplace, the problem of the hierarchy that runs your workplace.

Let's look in our own homes and at our own families. Can we honestly say that at least at home we find peace? Here is our sanctuary? How many husbands and wives live together in a cold war of bitterness and resentment? When they do talk about things beyond what is on TV or what is for dinner, there is a fight. They can't talk about their financial situation or what one of them is spending or what one of them is making. They can't talk about the kids. They can't talk about sex. They can't talk about one of their parents without fighting. There is conflict with ex-spouses, conflict with in-laws, conflict about drinking, conflict about work.

And what about the way our kids relate? By God's grace, it has gotten better and better as our children have gotten older. Now that they are teenagers, they actually get along sometimes which is really, really nice to see. But when they were younger, my goodness, they would fight about anything. "Mom, he is looking out my window in the car, tell him to stop." "She is breathing on me." "That is my candy." "That is my hat."

And to bring the camera in for the closest look, let's move down from the level of the world to the level of our nation, to our families, down to the individual and I will ask you this question in introducing today's subject: Are you, as an individual, completely at peace? Do you live with an inner tranquillity that doesn't fade? Or is there a restlessness in you? A turbulence most of the time? Do you live with an inner calm and quietness? Would you characterize your inner state most of the time as peace? Ease?

Or do you live with a high degree of tension? A high degree of anxiety? Pushed and pulled by forces inside of you? Upset? Irritable?

I want to make one simple point today as we look at our text. That is that people apart from God cannot produce peace. They can produce cease fires. They can produce treaties. They can have cold wars. They can pass resolutions and work contracts and hand down judicial decrees and grant divorces. But apart from God, people cannot produce peace in their families, in their churches, in their workplaces or in their nations.

You know, God will let people have a great many things apart from him. Whether you turn to God or not, God may let you become successful. Whether you believe in God or not, God may let you become wealthy. Whether you ever bow your knee and say "thank you" to God, God may allow you to have a hard body, to get a great tan, to look good. God will let people enjoy a great many things apart from him even if they refuse to tip their cap to him.

But there is one thing that people can never have apart from God. And that is peace. If you want inner peace, if you want peace in your family, if you want peace in your home, if you want peace in the world, if you want inner peace, there is only one place that we must go. That is to God.

And so as we look at today's passage, I have called my talk, "The Secret to Having Peace." Let's pray.

Ephesians 2:11-18

“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men)—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. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

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

Why is it that we have so many divisions? Why is it that we look out on a world of divisions along every possible line we can imagine?

I think verse 11 here gives us a secret to understanding divisions. It says, “Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and call ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men)...” You know, God is the one who made distinctions. God is the one who distinguished between Gentiles and Jews. He created the distinction. It was because of him that from the mass of humanity, one man was selected, namely Abraham. One nation was chosen, namely the Jews. That was God’s doing. It is God’s doing to make us men and women; Brown, Black and White; Hispanic, Oriental, Native American.

But people take the distinctions that God makes, the distinctions based on birth, race, class, and they turn them into destructive divisions. Oh, I can’t have a relationship with you because I am different than you. Behind that statement, what we really always mean is that I am better than you. We take distinctions that God has made and because of our pride, we turn them into destructive divisions.

Do you want to know the reason why there are so many destructive divisions in the world? It is simply because of human pride. Our group must end up first. We must always appear to be the best. We must always be top dog, #1. We are Americans. We are Germans. We are Japanese. We have to be the best. It is pride that creates destructive divisions between people and breaks relationship.

I am not going to be the first to end the argument. I am not going to apologize. I am not going to allow her to push me around. I am not going to allow them to step me, to trample my rights. It is pride.

The Jews in Paul’s day were filled with pride. Just read Paul’s own autobiographical history. It is dripping with sinful pride. Look at how I used to regard myself. Paul says in Philippians 3: “If anyone had reason for pride, I had more. I was circumcised on the 8th day of the people of Israel. I was a Jew born of the tribe of Benjamin. A Hebrew of Hebrews. I wasn’t one of these Greek Jews. I was a real Jew. I was a Pharisee, not just a commoner. Regarding following all the minutia of the law, I was blameless. I was zealous.” Pride.

And I think that Ephesians 2:11 tells us how we can spot pride. We are not very good at diagnosing sin. We are like physicians who miss the obvious symptoms. Many

of us might sit back and say, “I am not proud of who I am. I am not full of pride.” But, God comes along and uses the straight edge of the Bible to allow us to see how crooked we are.

God says, let me show you your pride. Pride is seen, first of all, in our tendency to label others. Look at verse 11. Paul says, “Remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised,’ labeled uncircumcised by those who call themselves ‘circumcision.’ One of the things that pride does is that it tends to label people and categorize them. The Jews weren’t the only ones in Paul’s day who did that. They did it. They called the Gentiles dogs, unclean, but the Greeks did the same thing. People who were not Greek were considered to be barbarians.

In my travels, I have discovered that no matter where you go people label people who live in another region of the country. In the north of England, people consider folks who live in the south of England to be arrogant, stuck-up, full of themselves. People in the south of England consider the people in the north to be lazy, less intelligent, dirty.

There are enormous divisions and jokes told by the Norwegians about the Swedes, and by the Swedes about other Scandinavians.

As a person coming from a Jewish background and living in primarily now in a Gentile world, I have had the most incredible things said to me about what Jewish people are like. Things that I have never heard before when I grew up in New York. Labels.

And we judge by externals. Paul says that you are labeled uncircumcised by those called “the circumcision” (that is done in the body)—something external. A cut of flesh is used as a source of pride. We judge each other by the externals of our skin color. The external of our nationality. The external of our gender. It has become popular now on TV to engage in male bashing.

I recently saw a commercial for a new show in which women were talking about how stupid men were. We have gone from the 1950’s in which women were said to be stupid and put down to the 1990’s where it is okay to bash men. It all caters to the pride of one gender over another.

And this pride can come from above as the wealthy judge the poor, but the pride can come from below. It is not just the Pharisee that judges the tax collector and “thank God that I am not like that guy,” it is the tax collector who will judge the Pharisee and say, “I thank God that I am not self-righteous and stuck-up like that religious person.” I thank God that I am not preppy, that I don’t live in the suburbs and don’t drive that big car. Judgment by externals.

And he finally says that pride is seen by our focus, by what is accomplished by the hands of men. “That done in the body by the hands of men.” Is this not the reason why there are so many church divisions? Because we focus on what is done by the hands of men? Churches have divided off from each other because we had to have certain hands laid on the leaders in order to pass along the blessing. If you didn’t have the proper bishop or appropriate elder laying hands on you, then you couldn’t receive the blessing from God. It was all a matter of the hands of men. Only certain hands can distribute the communion wafer. Only certain hands could baptize you in water. Only certain hands could dedicate your baby. It is all pride. Instead of humbly receiving the gifts of God and saying to God, “The reason why I am what I am and have what I have

is because of your gifts” we look at what our hands have made. We separate ourselves from others whose hands were not able to accomplish what our hands have.

What is the answer? What is the Solution? The apostle Paul says in verse 14 regarding Christ, “He himself is our peace.” He is our peace.

Let’s remember the context of Paul’s argument here. This whole discussion about destructive divisions, about separations between people is bracketed by two great prayers by the apostle Paul. Paul prays in Ephesians 1 that we might have the eyes of our heart enlightened to be able to appreciate God’s power in us who believe. That we might appreciate God’s power. And in Ephesians 3:18 he prays that we could know God’s love.

And in this discussion on divisions, what the apostle Paul is attempting to communicate to us is that one of the best ways for you to really appreciate and celebrate God’s power in your life and God’s love toward you is to watch God work peace where there has previously been division and animosity and antagonism and judgment. It is a miracle of God’s power and love when people at war become friends. Remember, I said before that you can have a lot of things in your life apart from God. You can have wealth, a great body, a good career without ever tipping the cap toward God, but you cannot have peace where there has previously been animosity and mistrust and broken relationships. For peace you must turn to Christ because he is our peace.

You see, God is a God of peace and not a God of divisions, a God of conflict, a God of animosity. God is a God of peace. That is what it says in Hebrews 13:20, “Now may the God of peace who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will.” That’s it. There it is. God is a God of peace.

And do you remember the first words spoken when God brought his Son into the world Christmas morning? What did the angels proclaim that God was doing through the birth of Jesus? The night the Son of God was born, the angels cried out, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace good will toward men.” He, Jesus, is our peace.

And the absence of peace in our families, in our marriages, in our church—the absence of peace is designed to be a jarring wake up call that we have separated ourselves from Christ. We cannot have peace while there is a distance between us and Christ.

The reason why we cannot have peace apart from God is because he is our peace. We must be in relationship with him, rooted in him, drawing from him in order to find peace.

It says of Jesus in Isaiah 9:6, “That of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end.” The reign of Jesus always brings peace.

He not only is our peace, but he makes our peace. It says in verse 14, “He himself is our peace who has made the two one and destroyed the barrier and dividing wall of hostility 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.” He not only is our peace, but [and you can underline this] he makes our peace.

Why does Paul emphasize that he, Jesus, alone makes peace? Because there is a tendency in the heart of men to believe that they can make peace. That essentially all we need to do is apply Christian principles to a group of people whether they are

Christian or not, Christian ideas, Christian understandings and we will be able to make peace. Just apply the teaching.

Some of you know that I was trained in law and taught at The Ohio State University. While I was involved in law and the legal profession, I was asked to help begin a service for Christians to resolve their differences out of court. It was called the Christian Conciliation Service. Well, invited to some of our original meetings of the Christian Conciliation Service, were a couple of professors from a nearby seminary. One of the individuals who was serving as part of this originating board, put together a simple statement of faith for board members. The statement of faith was a bare bones statement that contained such items as:

“We believe that God is a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

“We believe in the atonement of Christ for our sins.”

“We believe in the physical resurrection of Christ.”

“We believe in the return of Christ.”

A bare bones statement of faith that board members who were going to serve on this Christian Conciliation Service would subscribe to.

I recall one of the professors picking up that statement of faith, reading it and throwing it on the table saying, “Why do we have to get involved in all of this theology?” Actually he called it “metaphysical speculation.” Why can’t we simply apply the Christian principles found in 1 Corinthians 6 about resolving our differences out of court?

He believed that the way to peace was to forget about Christ, except as an example, forget about the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, forget about the vertical dimension of man’s need for God. To him, all we need to do is charge people to follow Christian principles and we can make peace on our own. But this seminary professor completely missed the whole message of the apostle Paul and the message of the New Testament. He missed the core. He missed the substance of the argument. All he had left was the shell.

It is not the case that Jesus simply came to announce to us a message that God loves us. So many liberal theologians think that the problem of men and women is that they don’t know that God loves them. And so Jesus came to deal with our misconception regarding God and to lift up our self-esteem.

Jesus didn’t come to simply announce the message that God loves us and to change our view of God so that we would go out then and make peace between nations, individuals, warring spouses. Jesus came to make peace.

And the first thing that is necessary for peace to be made is for us to realize that there is a conflict, that there is enmity, that there is a separation. The Bible uses a lot of different words to describe the situation of men and women in their pride and in their sin. It speaks of us as being separated from God. It tells us that we are alienated from God. The Bible says we are far from God. That there is enmity between us. The Bible says the enmity is not only from our side, that we are rebellious, but that God is angry with sinners. That there is wrath resting on those who sin. There is a state of hostility between people and God and between people and each other.

Do you know the first thing that is necessary for peace to be made? We have to honestly deal with the reality of a conflict. We are at odds with God. We do have broken relationships with certain people. To deal with the conflict, we must first of all

start speaking the truth to each other and listening to the truth from God. All is not right with the world. All is not right with our relationship with God. All is not right in your varying relationships in your family and at your workplace.

Unfortunately, people use a variety of false strategies to deal with the truth of conflict. Some people engage in denial. Angry? I am not angry. I receive what you are saying. And I humbly apologize. We don't have a problem.

Some people deny the presence of a conflict. Christians add to this denial super-spirituality. Oh, Jesus has made me love you. Well, if Jesus has, great. But why do you seem so angry. Why is your body tensing up? Why are you glaring. Why is the tone of your voice changing? Why are your fists balled up like you want to punch someone?

When people don't deal with the truth of conflict, they not only engage in denial, but in detours. You know what it is like to be at odds with an individual, you don't want to see them. You don't want to look them in the eye. You don't want to be in close proximity with them. You avoid them. You make a detour around people that you are having a problem with. And if you don't detour around the person, if you can't do that, then you detour and dance around the problem.

As I mentioned earlier, many marriages have to dance around a whole range of issues. We can't talk about your smoking. Or your work habits. Or your spending habits. Or your nights out with the boys. Certain subjects are off-limits. Denial. Detour.

And discouragement. Oh, what's the use? We will never be able to get alone. This person is just not willing to have a relationship. They can't hear the truth. They are not the kind of people that you can make peace with. We have to divorce. We have to split the church. We have to divide the group.

I would remind you that it is not our job, at least as an initial matter, to make peace. That is the job of Jesus Christ. He makes peace. And it is always peace based on telling us the truth that we have a conflict, that we have a problem. People want to run right to peace, but they want to get there by avoiding truth about their behavior, about their sin.

You know, the basis of peace in the Bible is always truth telling and righteousness. That is why I think the apostle Paul says in Romans 14:17, "The kingdom of God is not eating or drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." There is an order. You can't have peace without righteousness, without putting away sin. And then you have peace. And out of that peace comes joy.

Isaiah 32:17 puts it absolutely plainly. It says, "The fruit of righteousness will be peace. The affect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever." Without righteousness, right actions, truth telling, putting away sin, there can be no peace. As Isaiah says later on in Isaiah 57:21, "There is no peace says my God for the wicked."

How does Jesus make peace? Well, we first of all must see that we have a conflict in two directions. There is a conflict between us and God, vertically, and there are conflicts between us and other people horizontally. You know, there were two cross beams that formed the cross that Jesus hung on. There was one vertical that was designed to deal with the problems between men and God. There was another that was horizontal. It was designed to deal with the problems that people have among themselves. Jesus made peace vertically by dealing with the enmity, the hostility that

existed between us and God. And as I said earlier, the hostility was not only us toward God so that our hearts needed to be broken and we needed to be won over toward God. Yes, our hearts needed to be broken. Yes the cross breaks our hearts and humbles us.

But there was also enmity from God's side toward us. Hostility toward us because of our sin. Romans 1:18 makes that very plain when it says, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth."

God was antagonistic toward us. And this is because God really cares about maintaining his holiness and his honor. So when his dignity, his holiness, his honor is challenged by rebellion or by ingratitude, or by disobedience, he actively promotes his own honor by showing wrath.

When a child is rebellious and talks back to a parent, is mouthy, ungrateful and a parent wishes to maintain their dignity, their authority, the way that parent does it is by drawing a line. By pushing back. That is what God does.

Jesus made peace between God and us by taking on himself at the cross God's wrath toward sin by bearing the punishment due us. He appeased God's wrath and satisfied God's honor.

Jesus made peace not only between God and us but between us and each other by doing what? By breaking down the wall, Paul said. By breaking down the walls, the barriers, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. The way that Jews and Gentiles were brought together as a Christian church is that Jesus Christ broke down the wall or the barrier that stood between them.

The picture that Paul was drawing from is the temple in Jerusalem. There were literally a series of walls and barriers in the temple. There was the court of the Gentiles that was the farthest out. That court of the Gentiles was partitioned off from the court of the people, the average Jews. And that was partitioned off by the court of the priests. And that was partitioned off from the most holy place. The temple, in its design, was a building filled with partitions and walls and barriers all set up by Old Testament regulations.

When Christ died, he got rid of all of the priestly rituals and the Old Testament regulations about how men and women could approach God. Now the way to God is opened up to anyone through Jesus. And so all of these barriers, all of these partitions that kept people out from the most holy place are torn down. There was no more need for animal sacrifices as laid out in the Old Testament. The symbols have been fulfilled. There is no longer a need for priestly garments and for all the holidays and washings and special oil. Instead of shadow, we have substance. Instead of rituals and regulations, we now have Christ. The way into the presence of God for all people is now Christ.

Christ not only broke down the barriers that kept people out from the presence of God, but Christ breaks down our barriers of pride that keep us separated from one another. Remember, I told you that what keeps us divided is pride, a focus on externals, a feeling that we are better than another person, that they are less than us. Yes, I know that you say that it is impossible to live with that individual. No one could

live with that woman. She is unsubmissive, unforgiving, nagging, spendthrift. She is like her mother. She is a terrible housekeeper.

I talked with a woman about why she is separating from her husband and she said, "It is because that man is impossible to live with. No one could live with him. He can't hold a job. He is unaffectionate. He is angry. He is noncommunicative. He sits in front of the TV

It is never our problem it is always their problem. But you confront a man or a woman with Jesus, bring that person face to face with the cross, give a man or woman a burst of insight concerning why Jesus hung on the cross, and you might hear a very different story. You might hear that man or woman say, "You know, I have been afraid to acknowledge what I am. I have been so afraid of people seeing me in my own brokenness, with my flaws. But as I stand before the cross, I have had revealed to me, myself. And the truth is I am a very selfish person. I am impatient. I have been difficult to live with. I have insisted on my own way. I do sound terrible when I am angry."

When I look at the cross I see what it cost God to make peace with the likes of me. And I not only see myself at the cross, I see that other person who I have had such difficulty with. And I see that their problems are no different, in kind, from mine. That we are both sinners and failures. Oh, the way that my sin is manifested may be different than theirs, but we are both equally sinners. The cross breaks down barriers that separated people. It breaks down religious barriers erected by the Old Testament law. It breaks down the barriers in our own hearts, namely our pride.

And Jesus not only broke down barriers negatively in dealing with the problem, but positively, Jesus makes us one. The apostle Paul says in verse 15, "He not only abolished in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations, but his purpose was to create." Creation is something positive. "To create in himself one new man out of the two."

Friends, peace is not just the absence of fighting. Peace is not just the cessation of hostility, the decision to stop speaking gossip about another person, to stop screaming at another person, to stop hurting another person. Peace means that enmity is turned into friendship. Not only are hostilities ended, but relationship is restored.

I have said throughout the talk that only God can make peace. People can keep the peace. The United Nations has peace keepers all over the world. There are peace keepers in Bosnia, in Israel, in Lebanon, in Northern Ireland, in Somalia—but they cannot make peace. We can end hostility. But only God can make us one.

And how did Jesus make Jew and Gentile one? By creating something that never existed in the history of the world. He created a totally new thing. The Christian church. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace. And in his body reconcile both of them to God. Jesus made Jews and Gentiles one. Not by improving on what existed before, but by creating something that never existed, the church. Jesus made Jews and Gentiles one, not by turning Gentiles into Jews and requiring Gentiles to be circumcised. Not by turning Jews into Gentiles and requiring Jews to be uncircumcised and live like Gentiles. But by bringing them both into an entirely new system, and entirely new being called the church, where circumcision and uncircumcision matters not at all. Where externals matter not at all.

Jesus made a totally new thing. A new race, if you will. The Jew-Gentile race. A new humanity, something that never existed before, Jesus created. And you know, all

the conflicts that you see in the New Testament church, all of them, are the result of people failing to grasp the newness of God's way of dealing with people. That he now deals with us on the basis of our membership in the Christian church. Not on the old basis of externals. All of the divisions that you see in the New Testament church spring out of still thinking in the old way.

There was a division in Acts 6 where Greek Jews were upset with Hebraic Jews. Externals. Thinking about life in the old way. There was a conflict in Acts 15 between Jews and Gentiles. There was a conflict in 1 Corinthians 8 about what people were going to eat and what they weren't going to eat. There was a conflict in James 2 between poor people and wealthy people.

Friends, so many of the conflicts that occur in the church today are the result of the failure of Christians to appreciate the radically new thing that Jesus has brought into being called the Christian church, where all of our external distinctions collapse. And it no longer matters how wealthy a person is or what color they are. Or what religious background they come from. Or what their education is. Or what they wear. Or how skilled they are. Because there is a new basis for relationship—the peace that Jesus made.

The Bible only recognizes one distinction now in the race of humanity. The distinction between knowing Christ and being related to Christ and not knowing Christ and not being related to Christ. There is only one division—Christian/non-Christian. All the other divisions, nationality, ethnicity, background, degrees—all of those other divisions dissolve into meaninglessness.

And so this message of peace, the barriers are broken down, the making of something new is announced. Verse 17, “He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.”

There is a need for peace, friends. Not only out there, between us and other people, between us and God, but in here. If there is one characteristic of people in their sin, it is a restlessness, a turbulence, and uneasiness. Isaiah 57 says that people are like the tossing sea which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. That is a picture of people in sin. Like the raging sea.

Do you feel like that? Do you live like that? This conflict going on inside of you—wanting to do what is right, but being tugged in the other direction by your desires. There is this inner war constantly being played out, like the turbulence of the sea. And this inner lack of peace, this restlessness, is something that is experienced by those who are not only far away from the kingdom, but those who are near. Look at who needs to hear the message of peace. Paul says that he came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. To the Gentiles and the Jews. Not only to those far away—to the junkies, the drug addicts, the alcoholics, the abusers, to people living in filth, but to people who are near need peace. People in the suburbs need peace. Go into the homes of suburban families and explore individual lives. It doesn't matter how near they are. They need peace.

Who is it that consumes the bulk of tranquilizers in our country? The poor? Who is it that run up the psychiatric bills in our country? Mainly the poor? Who is that consumes all the time of family therapists? Mainly the poor? Who is it that buys most of the self-help books? The poor?

You know, friends, it doesn't matter how far from the kingdom you are or how near to the kingdom you are, the only thing that matters is if you are in the kingdom. You may consider yourself a nice person, perhaps you are. You may be near to the Kingdom, but are you in? That's the question.

Let me close with an illustration.

When Marlene and I were in England a couple of months ago, we were traveling by train from Cambridge down to London. We pulled up to the station and saw that they train had just pulled in. I needed to get our bags out of the trunk. Marlene ran ahead to ask the conductor to hold the train. In the meantime, I went to our trunk and pulled out our suitcases and ran toward the train. I got up to the train just as the doors slammed in my face and the train pulled away from the station. I literally missed the train by two seconds.

What do you think my feeling was as I stood there, having come so near to getting on that train? Do you think I said, "Ha! At this moment, I feel so good because my position is superior to the position of the man that is going to come 20 minutes from now."

Friends, it doesn't matter how near a person is. It only matters if you are in. You cannot find peace apart from God and in Christ.