

Sermon – 25/05/2008 am

Brought Near By Blood

Study Text: Ephesians 2:13-18

Paul was writing this letter to the Ephesians while in chains in Rome. Why was he in chains? He had appealed to Caesar after being set upon by the Jews in Jerusalem and rescued by the Romans. Why did the Jews attack him? They thought he had taken a Gentile into the temple (Acts 21:28).

The temple was a magnificent structure but its main feature was the walls. A wall or heavy curtain separated men from God's presence in the Most Holy Place. Only one man was allowed through that curtain, and only once a year, and not without blood. Another wall separated the women and yet another kept the Gentiles from entering the temple. On this outer wall was a notice warning Gentiles against entering. It declared that doing so would result in arrest. The person arrested would be responsible for his own death which would automatically follow – as Paul well knew!

To further understand the enmity between Jew and Gentile listen to this quote. 'To the Jews the law was the bastion of their privileges from which they looked down on the 'unclean' Gentiles with unmingled contempt; while to the Gentiles it was the outlandish rampart of an assumed superiority behind which 'the enemies of the human race' practised their abominable rites'. Such enmity of course is not only found between Jew and Gentile. Looking down on those different to ourselves with an assumed superiority is not uncommon and leads to much hostility in the world today. This quotation ends with the words 'their reconciliation was therefore a miracle of God's grace'.

Partition

In this second half of Ephesians 2 we come to a second *but now*. Remember the first *but now* coming after the reminder that these believers were formerly dead in their sins. *But now* God in his grace made them alive together with Christ. Salvation was seen as a change from being dead to being alive, to being regenerated and raised up with Christ.

In this passage salvation is seen from another perspective. It is seen as being brought near or into the presence of God in Christ. Gentiles in particular were far from God. They were without Christ and without God in this world.

When Adam and Eve sinned against their Creator, God threw them out of the garden, out of paradise. A revolving flaming sword prevented their return. This was and still is the most fundamental partition in human history – the partition between God and man. This partition was symbolised in the temple by the heavy curtain separating the most holy place.

This partition, this separation from God, inevitably led to a partition between man and man. Fellowship between human beings was broken. God called the Jews and made them his own special people. He made a covenant with them; he gave them the commandments and the sacrifices. But he did not intend this to be the end, nor did he intend for them to become proud

and deny others access to these privileges. His house was to be known as *a house of prayer for all nations* (Isaiah 56:7).

As we have seen in the previous verses the Jews majored on the minors. They majored on the externals, on the sign rather than the reality signified. The law and the rituals God gave under the covenant all pointed forward to Christ. Christ would fulfil the law; he would render the first covenant obsolete (Hebrews 8:13); he would offer up himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin rendering all animal sacrifices null and void. As one writer puts it 'the death of Christ effected the divine de-consecration of the Jerusalem temple, signalling its ultimate destruction in AD70'.

Propitiation

We were by nature children of wrath just as the others. We came across this sentence back in 2:3 – and what a sentence it is! Behind the campus on which we lived in India was a leprosy hospital. We would often visit the doctor there for fellowship and Bible study. On the roadside going to this hospital was a large sign which read 'leprosy is a word not a sentence'. Leprosy can be cured if treated in time. If not the victim may go blind and start to lose limbs.

What we read here in 2:3 is a sentence; it is the sentence of death. All sin is against God and results in God's wrath. God's wrath brought death and the separation that we have described. How is the wrath of God to be appeased? How can sinners be reconciled to God? We looked at reconciliation previously but not at propitiation. This not-so – common word describes the turning away of God's wrath upon us because of our sin. It is found in the Bible in I John 4:10 and Romans 3:25, which tell that in the blood of Jesus, God is propitiated, or his wrath is turned away.

The word propitiation literally means 'mercy seat', the place on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant where blood was sprinkled. We have come back to the temple and its very centre. The high priest took the blood of a sacrificed animal and sprinkled it on the mercy seat on the annual Day of Atonement. Propitiation was by blood, by the death of a substitute, because death is the penalty for sin. That penalty remains for all who are outside of Christ, all who have not been brought near by the blood of Christ.

In the marvellous grace of God our sentence was served by Jesus. He died in our place. That is what this reference to the blood of Jesus means. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. The Jews knew this but not the Gentiles. The Gentiles were not allowed into the temple to participate in the atonement ritual. So Paul has to explain to them not the role of animal sacrifices but the role of the perfect and final sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

What does it mean to believe in Jesus? Is it just to believe he was a good man who died an untimely and cruel death? Is it just to believe that he sets us the best example of how to live? To believe in Jesus for salvation and eternal life is to believe he shed his blood for the propitiation of your sins. In his blood you have forgiveness of sin. In his blood you who were once far off have been brought near, brought through the torn curtain and into the presence of God.

The Jews knew that God is gracious and forgives sin. They followed the covenant command to sacrifice animals and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat. They did this year after year. In fact there were daily sacrifices for sin. But they knew, or should have known, that such

sacrifices were not in the end effective. They had to be repeated. What if they sinned and died before they could make a sacrifice? Sadly some take the same attitude towards the sacrifice of Christ. It is only effective they say when a priest ‘administers’ it.

Peace

By his blood Jesus has brought us near; indeed into the presence of God. No longer children of wrath *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access into this grace in which we now stand* (Romans 5:1). Jesus himself is our peace (2:14). Paul’s main focus in this passage is peace between Jew and Gentile but peace with God in the blood of Jesus Christ is prior to, and fundamental to, such peace.

The gospels tell of the curtain being torn in two (Luke 23:45). Here Paul sees the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile come crashing down as one new body of believers in Christ is formed. Not so long ago the apparently impregnable and enduring Berlin Wall came crashing down by the hands of men. This ‘middle wall of partition’ was no less impregnable and enduring. It came crashing down, not by the hands of men, but by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus abolished in his flesh/body the law of commandments and regulations (2:15), not with the stroke of a pen but by his own blood. Were the Gentiles now being allowed into the temple to join the Jews in their sacrifices? Certainly not! Were the Gentiles now being allowed into the Mosaic covenant? Certainly not! As Sinclair Ferguson puts it ‘to leave the administration of Moses in place would be to miss the whole point of it being established in the first place!’

The Jews themselves were not saved through the law. The law had no power to save them or anyone. *Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes* (Romans 10:4) – everyone including Jew and Gentile. In the blood of Christ a new way has been opened up. In Christ God has created *one new man from the two, thus making peace* (2:15). In Christ both Jew and Gentile are reconciled to God, and it is in this reconciliation that they are reconciled to one another – *thereby putting to death the enmity* (2:16). *Through Christ we both* – note the *we* meaning Jew and Gentile and thus all believers – *have access by one Spirit to the Father* (2:18).

This is the wonderful gospel of grace, the gospel of salvation and of peace with God through the blood of Jesus Christ. We saw the gospel in 2:8 – salvation by grace alone through faith alone. We see the gospel again here in 2:13 – brought near by the blood of Christ. In Christ we have peace with God and with one another. This is the amazing grace of Jesus Christ who brings us into a oneness with himself and with God the Father, and at the same time into a oneness with all who are in Jesus Christ.

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