

Peace

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[0 : 00] Do you remember that time when the world was at peace? Or do you remember that year when nobody died or was hurt in any war or conflict?

Do you remember that? The answer, of course, is no, isn't it? None of us remember that because no such time or year existed.

Peace is something we know we all need. And yet it is something that seems so far away, doesn't it? If there is one thing that is constant in this world, it seems to be that it is conflict.

And conflict is not only constant, it is everywhere.

It exists out there in the world, doesn't it? And it exists in our day-to-day lives as well. And I think when you think about it, you'll realize that the closer a conflict is to home, the less at peace we are.

[1 : 25] The closer a conflict is to home, the less at peace we are. We hear of the needless bloodshed, don't we?

The innocent lives lost on the news week by week. And we are rightly saddened by it. We shake our heads and we talk about it sorrowfully with family and friends.

But those aren't the conflicts, are they? That are going to keep you up at night. Those are not the conflicts that stop you being able to rest after a busy day at work.

But fall out with a colleague and you're taking that home with you. Have an argument with one of your closest friends.

And it's going to be a few days at least, isn't it? Before you feel some sense of peace again. The closer to home those conflicts get, the less at peace we are.

[2 : 35] Fall out with your parents or child or a brother or sister. Those wounds are deeper and last longer still. A marriage starts falling apart and your world will be turned upside down.

When conflicts are close to home, when it is the relationships that are most important to us that are affected by it, that is, isn't it, that is when we know what it really feels like not to be at peace.

That's when we realize what true peace really means. And it's more, isn't it, than just a laying down of arms, but enjoying, loving being with others.

And when we lose that, we lose peace. I wonder if I can ask you today, do you feel at peace in your life?

Or better yet, do you know you are at peace? If you do not know you are at peace this morning, perhaps that is because the most important relationship of all is the most broken of all.

[4 : 01] Perhaps the one person you should be closer to than anyone else is the person you are furthest from. Let me just tell you this morning that if you know him, the one who offers peace, then you will know peace.

But before we get to the one who offers peace, we meet, first of all, in Luke 23, the many who chose conflict. The many who choose conflict.

As we approach Easter weekend, we are diving right into the end of Luke's gospel. And so there is much we have missed. But let me just quickly fill you in, in case you're unfamiliar with the gospel stories.

Luke has been following the life of Jesus in his book. And for most of the first 22 chapters, this Jesus has been living no ordinary life.

He has performed countless miracles. He's made the lame walk. He's given sight to the blind. He's raised the dead to life. The first part of the gospel is filled with many such historical events.

[5 : 17] But then in the second half of the gospel, Luke has spent most of his time revealing what Jesus has taught. It's almost like he says, you thought what he did was impressive.

Wait until you hear what he's been saying. And Luke's not the only one impressed with Jesus' teaching. There were large crowds who were following him because of the authority of what he was

saying and the miraculousness of what he was doing.

But not everyone was happy, were they? We picked up the story at the start of chapter 23 earlier in the service with the religious leaders of ancient Israel dragging Jesus before Pilate, the Roman governor of the province at that time.

And look at what it is. If you just turn back to verse 5 of chapter 23, look at what it is that they are so upset by, so angered. Not the miracles, is it? But they insisted he stirs up people all over Judea by his teaching.

It is Jesus' teaching that leaves these religious leaders so infuriated. And so they falsely accused Jesus of all sorts of things.

[6 : 39] But they are unable to condemn him, aren't they? They are able to provide the witness or the testimony they need because there is no witness or testimony that they claim to have.

And so Pilate, with the evidence he has been presented with, says the only thing he can say, this man is not guilty. He is innocent.

This man is innocent. But the religious leaders, not to be deterred so easily, they convince the crowds that have gathered for a festival season in Jerusalem to beg Pilate to crucify Jesus.

Pilate appealed to the crowds, but they kept shouting, verse 21, crucify him, crucify him. For the third time, verse 22, Pilate speaks to them, why?

What crime has this man committed? I have found no grounds in him for the death penalty.

[8 : 01] Verse 23, but with loud shouts, they insistently demanded that he be crucified. And their shouts prevailed.

And so a murderer is released, and the innocent man is crucified.

And crucifixion was no humane death penalty. It was one of the most barbaric and degrading methods of execution that the ancient world could conjure up.

You would be stretched out over a wooden cross. Just imagine it for a moment so you can understand the horror of what is going on here. Stretched out over a wooden cross.

And then a Roman soldier would start hammering nails through each one of your hands and wrists. And then the same with your feet.

[9 : 24] One at a time. It's not a pleasant start, is it? But things only get worse. You are lifted up on this wooden cross and left simply hanging there.

Hanging there, not like you're doing a pull-up. You're not holding on to anything. But your whole body weight is being supported on the very nails that have just been driven through you.

Every time you want to take a breath, you have to push all your weight against your own open wounds.

And lift yourself up on those nails just to get a gasp of breath. And slowly but surely, after every agonizing breath, breath, not just a few minutes, but hour after hour, sometimes days, slowly but surely, you start to suffocate.

You start to feel like you're doing a lot only because your body runs out of the strength it needs to pull itself up on the nails driven through your hands and feet.

[11 : 04] The breaths get shorter and shorter. You begin to be suffocated by the weight of your own body. The excruciating pain becomes greater and greater until eventually your body gives up.

All in front of a watching crowd having been beaten and scourged beforehand. That was crucifixion. And here we have an innocent man who everyone knew was innocent.

Pilate knew he was innocent. The religious leaders knew their testimony was false. Even the criminal on the cross next to him could say, verse 41, this man has done nothing wrong.

Everyone knows he is innocent and yet everyone is watching him die the most excruciating death. How do you think the crowds are going to respond to this most sorrowful sight?

[12 : 32] What do we see? Verse 35. The rulers, the ones who had forced this unjust execution on Jesus, do they start feeling guilty for what they've done?

Not in the slightest. They sneer at him. The soldiers who are hammering this guiltless man to a cross, verse 36, are they apologetic?

No, they come up and mock him. even from one of the criminals being executed next to him, there is no pity. He just hurls insults at.

As we read through chapter 23, I asked you to ask yourself as we were reading through it, who is at peace and who is not? Who is at peace and who is not?

I wonder who you picked out in each of those categories because I think at face value the answer is quite surprising, isn't it? The man being horrifically mistreated, the victim of massive injustice, the one suffering agonizingly, he is the one at peace.

[13:56] He speaks graciously. He never responds in anger. He never lashes out in frustration. He never reacts to the cruel insults or the mocking of the soldiers.

A victim of unspeakable hatred, suffering the most painful death. Things surely that we might think are the opposite of peace.

But Jesus, through it all, is at peace. That's not true of everyone, is it?

And when you read it, you realize the ones who are not at peace are not the victims of wrongdoing. But the perpetrators of wrongdoing.

Those who are sneering, mocking, and insulting. Those aren't the actions of people at peace, are they? And yet those are the ones who have sinned, not the ones who are being sinned against.

[15:02] The people who are not at peace are the religious leaders who have borne false witness. The soldiers who are hammering an innocent man to the cross. The criminal who deserves the punishment he is receiving.

Those who are not at peace are those who know they are guilty. Those who are not at peace are those who know they are guilty.

They are the ones who are bringing conflict. And that is a helpful insight, isn't it?

To all of the conflict we see in this world and we see in our own life. I imagine you don't have to cast your mind too far back. And I'm saying this because I don't have to cast my mind too far back.

That the last time you got into some kind of conflict with someone, whether you fell out with them, whether you said something to them out of anger, whether you lashed out, whether you got impatient.

[16:13] Not because of what they had done, but because of what you had done. When you mistreated someone because you knew you had done something you shouldn't have.

And you took out your frustration or guilt on someone else. The reason this world is a world that is not at peace is not because of the problems out there, but the problems in here.

in each and every one of us, when we know we are guilty of something, we bring the conflict.

And conflict brings division, the very opposite of harmony, the opposite of peace. That is where conflict originates and that is all of us.

We have all broken relationships, haven't we? We have all broken peace by our actions.

[17:29] But the most broken relationship of all is not with any other person, but with God himself. And we have broken that relationship so severely by living in open conflict with him.

Before we know Christ, Paul does not hesitate to say we were enemies of God. Enemies of God. Now you might think, I don't remember fighting against him.

What do you do when you really fall out with someone? When you're really upset or angry with them?

When we really fall out with people, we quite often, don't we, start to live as if they don't exist. We ignore all their attempts to speak to us and get in contact with us.

We pass them in the streets or at work or in church, we don't look at them, we don't listen to them, we don't move out the way for them, and often we'll even try to blame them for what we've done.

[18:56] We know we've broken the relationship, but we will find a way of passing on the guilt. we live as if they don't exist.

And that is so often what the world does, isn't it, with the God that we have all wronged. Convince themselves, ourselves, that it is not really our fault and turn a blind eye to the God who made us and the God who loves us.

that is where our conflict with God begins, not in what He has done or not done, but in what we have done and we know we have done.

And then we choose to run and hide. We have caused the greatest division in the most important relationship we have, in the closest relationship that should exist in every single one of our lives.

Between us and our Creator, there is the largest divide. And so it is that with a good God but a guilty people, we end up in a world without any peace.

[20:20] Because we are the many who have chosen conflict over peace. And we have done and can do nothing to breach that gap.

We have done nothing to restore peace. We can do nothing. Many have chosen conflicts peace.

But there is one who offers peace. Because this man we read of hanging on a cross, innocent but condemned to a cruel death, is no ordinary man.

We've mentioned it already this morning, but if you were to read through the pages of Luke's gospel for yourself, and I would strongly encourage you to do just that, you'd be left in no doubt about just who this Jesus is.

As we heard last week, this Jesus is a man who brought the dead back to life. He heals people from afar with nothing but a word.

[21 : 45] He teaches with unparalleled authority. He commands the wind and the waves. to be still, and they listen. He forgives people's sins.

And the religious leaders rightly look on and say, only God can do that. God's God.

But Jesus is not blaspheming or usurping God's authority as a religious leader's thought because he is God.

That's what his teachings leave undeniable. It is what his miracles pointed to. It is what his disciples professed. But if he is God, why is he on a cross?

If he is God, why is he on a cross? I don't know if you noticed, but that is exactly the question, the sneering and mocking and insulting onlookers asked to.

[22 : 56] Verse 35, he saved others. Let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the chosen one.

Verse 37, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. Verse 39, aren't you the Messiah?

Save yourself. Each and every one of them was looking for Jesus to prove his divinity by saving himself.

But that is what they got so wrong. Because God did not come to save himself, but to save others. Not to save himself, but to save the very people who were nailing him to the cross. It's amazing, isn't it?

[24 : 06] The centurion, verse 47, praises God. The man overseeing his murder praises God because he did not save himself, but saved others.

He could have saved himself. Of course he could have. But instead of choosing conflict, Jesus chose peace, not just for himself, but for everyone who puts their faith and trust in him.

By our sin, we have caused a great division between ourselves and God, and that sin demands justice, but we cannot, can we, pay that price ourselves. God's.

But Jesus' death is what paid the price to bring us back into a right relationship with God, the most important relationship in your life, where there has been the greatest conflict and the least peace. He has come to restore. God's. God's. God's. God's. If you are not at peace with God, you will never be at peace.

[25 : 26] You might not think that's the first relationship in your life that you need to fix. Let me tell you that it is. because it is the relationship that affects every other relationship you have.

And if there is no lasting peace there, there will be no lasting peace anywhere else. Jesus did not save himself so that he could save you.

And so while there are many who choose conflicts, there is one who offers peace. But as with every offer, if we want to know its benefits, we have to accept it.

All we have to do is accept it as a gift, but we still do have to open our hands, don't we, and acknowledge this is something we desperately need.

And we can do that very simply by following the footsteps of the second criminal we meet in this chapter. Verse 40, he rebukes the other criminal who's insulting Jesus, and then does four very simple things that we must do too if we want to know the peace that Jesus offers.

[26 : 54] First, he fears God, doesn't he? Running from God's presence or from his very existence presence is our natural instinct when we know we have much to hide.

But fearing God is knowing that we cannot hide and that he will call things to account. First, he fears God, and then secondly, he confesses what he deserves.

He knows he is not a righteous man. He knows he deserves punishment. punishment. We are justly punished, he says. That is where we too must begin if we want to know peace with God.

Not pointing to the little good we might have done, but acknowledging the much wrong we have most definitely done. He fears God, he confesses that he is in the wrong, and then thirdly, he believes Jesus is who he says he is.

He believes Jesus is who he says he is. Not only does he rightly believe that Jesus has done nothing wrong, he believes, doesn't he? He is the Son of God. It's a staggering thing that he says

there in verse 42.

[28 : 08] Two men, moments away from death on a cross, and one says to the other, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

When you come into your kingdom. Jesus is the king and judge of heaven and earth, and this man knows it and believes it.

Jesus' death on the cross was not a sign of defeat or failure, but his once and for all sacrifice to bring us back into a peaceful relationship with God.

This man knew it and he believed it and so fourthly and finally, he committed his life into Jesus' hands. He believes Jesus is who he says he is, and then he entrusts his life into his hands.

He knows he can do nothing for himself. If there was ever a man who had no opportunity to right his wrongs, this was him. But that is not what Jesus asks of us.

[29 : 20] Instead of trying and failing to put his life right, he was watching Jesus do exactly that for him on that cross next to his. He fears God.

He confesses his sin. He believes Jesus is who he says he is, and then he simply asks him for help. Remember me. Remember me. Remember me. Remember me. And what does Jesus say?

Sorry, you didn't quite do well enough in life. You're actually a bit late. No. He says an even more amazing thing, doesn't he?

Truly, I tell you, today you'll be with me in paradise. In a place of perfect peace and harmony. where every relationship will be as good as it can be and was ever meant to be forever and ever, including the most important relationship of all. That is the sure and certain hope that awaits this criminal hanging on a cross.

[30 : 37] life. That doesn't mean, does it, that life in here and now will be easy and full of prosperity.

Just look at the life Jesus lived. Look at the death the criminal continued to die. His death would have been no less painful. It would not have come any quicker.

fear, but he would have faced it in peace, knowing that what awaited him was far better than anything he had seen in his short life.

life. And that is the same sure and certain hope that awaits everyone who follows him in fearing God, confessing our need for help, and asking Jesus, the Son of God, to remember us in his kingdom.

You will be at peace when you know you are right with God, and that he will one day soon come to make everything right in his kingdom.

[31 : 57] If you want to know peace, you must know Jesus. Let us pray as we close together.