Opening Words

The failure to provide the full dimensions of the Gospel message led to one of the greatest acts of genocide in the world in our lifetime. I hope you will listen today and learn how we can prevent this from happening again.

135 Eph Peace Among People

Steve Corbett, a professor at Covenant College, was teaching a group of Christians in Africa. He was presenting material like the material I have shared about the four faces of death and the four faces of salvation, i.e., that death has affected every part of life and salvation redeems every part of life – it is not just about the soul going to heaven. He shared a more comprehensive view of salvation that Christ has come to bring us into a right relationship with others as well as a right relationship with God.

When Steve finished his presentation, a strong African man approached him with tears and said, "This is not what the missionaries taught us. They taught us just to do evangelism and to save people's souls. But you are saying that Jesus cares about all of creation and that he wants us to minister to people's bodies and souls."

Steve spoke to this man who was moved by the presentation. He spoke highly of the missionaries and their sacrifice to take the saving gospel of Jesus to different parts of the world. But he also shared the sad truth that often the missionaries did not give the complete message of Christ. Yes, they shared the complete message of how a person can come into a right relationship with God by grace through faith. There was no denying that. But they failed to mention that the salvation that Christ brought into the world, the salvation of His kingdom, was also to bring people into a right relationship with one another, to heal our wounded hearts, and one day to heal all of creation.

The failure to provide this component of Christ's message and to have it permeate all of society was a factor leading to one of the most horrifying acts of genocide in modern times. In the 1990s, in Rwanda, tensions were at a boiling point between the majority Hutus and minority Tutsis, and through a series of events, which are too detailed to mention here, the majority Hutus embarked on a weeks-long slaughter of the Tutsis and of moderate Hutus. Up to 800,000 were brutally killed.

I remember watching a movie about this a few years ago called *Hotel Rwanda*. It was not graphic, yet still hard to watch because you knew what was going on in the countryside as people sought refuge in a hotel from the mayhem that had engulfed the country. When the movie was over, I remember turning off the TV and turning off the lights in the living room. My wife and I sat in the dark for almost an hour and talked and prayed. We asked God to use us to make a difference for his glory in the lives of people and to make a difference in the nations of the world.

But here is even the more shocking truth we learned about this massacre – Rwanda had been evangelized and fully 80% of the population claimed to be Christian! Many people who participated in the massacre would have said that they were followers of Jesus! To be sure, it is easy to say

falsely "I am a Christian," but this is too easy of an answer and can be an excuse for not taking responsibility. What happened in Rwanda had many causes to it, but one of them was that God's people forgot to teach that salvation is not just upward. Salvation is not just Godward. Salvation is outward. Salvation is people-ward as well. God reconciled us with himself that we might be reconciled with one another.

Let's listen to Paul's words in Ephesians 2:17-19: **0007 Quiet**

> AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;
> 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,

In verse 17, Paul quotes from the great prophecy of Isaiah 57:19 about God speaking peace to his people. God had judged them. God sent them into Babylonian exile. But he promised that he would speak peace to them, restore them to the land, and bring them back to himself. But Paul makes a wider application of this verse. Paul shares that God is speaking peace to Israel and he is also speaking peace to the nations. And God is not just speaking about peace between man and himself, he is speaking peace between man and man.

Listen to the verse again – And Christ came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near." The ones who were far away were the Gentiles. Paul said in verse 13 that "you were formerly far off". The ones who were near were the Jewish people because they had the covenants of promise. But Christ came and preached peace to both, telling Jew and Gentile that both could have peace with God. We must do the same, and we must demonstrate our peace with God by living in peace with one another.

Paul says in verse 18 that through Christ we both have access by the Spirit to the Father. Jew and Gentile come equally to God in the Spirit through the name of Jesus Christ. God does not have favorites. He loves Jew and Gentile, and to get back to our story at the beginning of the broadcast, God loves Hutu and Tutsi. Christ, through the missionaries, came to them both and preached peace to them both and both have equal access to God through the Spirit through Jesus Christ.

I wonder if that was ever preached in Rwanda? I wonder what would have happened if missionaries had preached the horizontal direction of salvation, that God sent his Son to reconcile us with himself and to reconcile us with one another?

This was a hard lesson for God's people to learn in the first century. It took them a generation to get their minds around the reality that Gentiles were just as much the people of God through Jesus Christ as Jews. This is what Paul gave his life for and why he suffered so much at the hands of his countrymen. They were infuriated by this message and they considered Paul to be a Jewish heretic. How could he say that Gentiles, as Gentiles, were on equal footing with the Jews? Gentiles had to be circumcised, they had to submit to the Laws of Moses, they had to keep the Sabbath. But Paul stood his ground and took the beatings and the stoning and the ostracism and the evil reports that circulated about him because he knew he had to get out this message at all cost – that in Christ Jesus

there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Jesus tried to teach this lesson to his apostles when he was on earth. Yes, Jesus' priority was Israel but he worked in Israel with an eye to the nations looking forward to the day when he would bring them into the family of God. On one occasion he said, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd." The Gospel of John says that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but [he would die] in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

One day a **Roman** centurion came to Jesus and said, "Lord just speak the word and my servant will be healed." Jesus marveled and said that no one in Israel had expressed faith like this **Roman** had. Jesus cast an evil spirit out of a Gentile woman's daughter and said the reason he did this was because of her great faith. Jesus stopped at a well in Samaria and entered a conversation with her that led to her faith and the faith of all the men in the village.

This had to have had a profound effect upon the disciples and years later when they were journeying into new regions of the world and proclaiming Christ I am sure they remembered these episodes in their lives with Jesus and it reinforced their conviction that God's will was to gather all people into one Body, to create a new humanity, a new man, to bring all people into God's family.

Thus, we hear Paul's majestic words:

> AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;
> 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household.

Did you catch those phrases in verse 19 and connect them with what Paul said earlier? In verse 12 he called the Gentiles "strangers" but in verse 19 he says you are no longer strangers. You are no longer aliens. In verse 12 he said you were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. But in verse 19 he says you are fellow citizens. In verse 12 he said you had no hope and were without God. But in verse 19 he says you are in God's household. You are part of the family.

The tragedy in Rwanda cost 800,000 lives but the consequences did not stop there. In a paper about this tragedy, I read that "The genocide fractured families, business partnerships, government coalitions, neighborhoods, civic organizations, churches, friendships, and even marriages." But God is at work. One organization in Rwanda is working with "a network of some 3,000 churches in Rwanda to foster reconciliation between Hutu and Tutsi Christians. At a church leaders retreat sponsored by *World Relief Rwanda* both Hutu and Tutsi Christians sought forgiveness from each other for what happened during the genocide. A local pastor who co-facilitated the retreat said, "The church has not been responsible enough in building and healing this nation. As church leaders, we are ashamed and guilty, but we want to take full responsibility for our failure and change our image as we work towards a better society." These kinds of efforts are multiplying throughout

Rwanda as some parts of the church continue to admit guilt and become agents of reconciliation and healing in a country that desperately needs it.

This is why Christ came – to bring us to God and to bring us to one another. Have you come to God through Jesus Christ, and if so, are you practicing reconciliation with others? Christ came to save us from our sin and to save us from one another's sin. He came to create a new family of praise in the earth.

We are going to look at this more in the following broadcasts as we continue in Ephesians 2. I hope you will join us for these important messages on the wonders of the spiritual world.