Introduction

It’s such a beautiful passage of Scripture. We’re going to be looking at that very passage this morning, as we consider the gift of Advent Peace. I want to invite you at this time to take out your Bibles and open them with me to the Book of Psalms. We’re going to be in Psalm 8; we will be looking this morning at that passage and pondering how it is that God chooses to give us the peace which comes through His Son Jesus Christ. As you came in this morning, you noticed that in your chair there is a Christmas Eve invite card. Our goal is for you to be able to take this card and give it to a friend, neighbor, coworker… whoever that is, the person that God places in your path, so that you can invite them to be part of our Christmas Eve service. We’re going to have three identical services this year. The first service will be on December 23rd at 7 p.m.; that’s for those of us in our church family who aren’t able to come and join us on Christmas Eve. We’ve already got plans or whatever. That service will be happening on the 23rd at 7 p.m. Then on the 24th, we will have two services at 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. We would love for you to take one or ten or twenty of these cards and go invite your friends and your neighbors, so that you can know if they come that night, they will hear a very clear presentation of the Gospel, and they will understand what it means to put their faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. Obviously, we don’t believe that it’s our job to take your place to share the Gospel. If there’s someone in your life that you believe would be open to coming to that service, we would certainly invite you to take these cards and let them know about that service. We also want you to be aware of our Advent devotionals. We’ve got a few of these left. Our Advent devotionals are available for you to walk through the season of Advent… right out here in our atrium. They are at the kiosk over here on this part of the atrium. We would love for you to grab one of those as well. Inside your worship guide today, you saw the 30 x 30 booklet. That is what this is. This 30 x 30 booklet that’s inside your worship guide gives you 30 different ideas that you could show love to your coworkers or to your neighbors over the 30 days leading up to Christmas Eve. You don’t have to do any of these, but we think that these ideas are some different ways that you can understand just an easy, simple way that you could love your neighbor, coworker, or friend and have an opportunity to begin a spiritual conversation. Our hope is that you will begin to do that broad Gospel sowing that we talk about where you get to share with them the Good News of Jesus. On the back of the 30 x 30 insert, you will see several different ways that you and your family can participate with Houston Northwest as we walk toward Christmas Eve. One of those ways is the Three Trees emphasis. There are three trees set up on our campus that have tags hanging on them. Those tags represent a family that’s in need this Christmas season. You can take one of those tags, and you can purchase the gifts for those families and then bring them back. We do need those gifts by this Wednesday, if that is at all possible for you. So take those tags but go and take care of those gifts before this Wednesday. Also you’ll notice on the back there… we’re caroling in the Prestonwood neighborhood. The Prestonwood neighborhood is just on the other side of 249, right here on Cypresswood Drive. It’s a neighborhood that is lit up to the max. Each of the streets has a different theme. Hundreds of cars drive through that neighborhood every year. We’re going to take three different nights… December 15th, 17th and 19th… and we’re going to be caroling in the yards of one of our church members that lives in the Prestonwood neighborhood, and we’re going to have Christmas Eve invites so that we can invite those folks to come and be part of the service. We need as many carollers… we just need warm bodies… we just need you to be there… If you will email us and say, “You know what… I will participate and be there on one of those three nights.” You don’t have to come on all three… just pick one that works with your schedule. We would love for you to be there with us, as we invite people to be part of our Christmas Eve service. We want them to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.
I’m going to pray over us, and then we’re going to jump into God’s Word, looking forward to seeing what it is that God wants to teach us here today. “Lord Jesus, thank you… Thank you for Your goodness; thank you for Your grace. God, thank you for the fact that You indeed give peace through Your Son and, God, that Your Word proclaims it faithfully and clearly. Lord, I ask that as we read Your Word, that we would indeed hear the thing you have for us here today. We pray this in the Name of Jesus Christ, the Great Gift. Amen.”

Psalm chapter 8… The Psalms are a collection of songs. These are hymns that would be sung in the worship gathering of the Israelites… of the Hebrews… of the Jews. Psalm 8 is a declaration of God’s goodness. “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth! You have set Your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, You have established strength because of Your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have set in place, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth!”

1. Peace With God.

Our God is a great, mighty, and powerful God. Can we agree on that? (Congregation: “Yes”) This God is so powerful that He has displayed His glory openly and clearly through creation. If we look and ponder the scope and the vastness of creation, we begin to actually understand just a tiny fraction of how big He is. Now, for most of us, creation is something we run past, and may be something we’re willing to get into an argument over, in a Creation versus Evolution mindset. But rather than looking at the binary argument, I want us to think simply about the truth that God chose to make something. There doesn’t have to be anything. Did you ever think about that? Scripture tells us that God is Triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In fact, Scripture gives us indication, as we study and understand the very essence and being of who God is, that the Father, Son, and Spirit had been relating to one another for all of eternity, in perfect relationship. Now God is only One, but the three Persons of the Trinity relate to one another in a way that is so beautiful and so perfect that they do not need anything else. They are completely content. God, the One Triune God, doesn’t need a thing. Nevertheless, that God chooses freely to create, and that God creates through speaking. His Words are spoken and from that creation emanates. Why does God create? Not because He needs to but simply because He wants to. That God chooses to speak and in speaking He makes: “Let there be light” and light happens. He wants there to be stars and stars happen. He wants there to be a universe and the universe happens. He does that because He realizes it’s a beautiful and physical way for His glory to be demonstrated. He is not synonymous with creation, but He inhabits and moves throughout creation. This God is that big. And while the rest of the ancient Near-East cultures thought of the universe as something created in violence or chaos, the Hebrew people wrote in their Scripture, in the Book of Genesis, that they believed creation to be beautiful and orderly and intentional. Something that God indeed ordained from the very beginning of time; God chose to create.

Just to give you a little picture of how incredible that is, Eric Metaxas wrote an article for the Wall Street Journal last year that appeared on Christmas Eve, almost a year ago, entitled “Science increasingly makes the case for God.” I have referenced that article a couple of times over the last year. It’s just an incredible article. To date, it is the most popular article that has ever appeared on the Wall Street Journal website. It
has received more clicks than any other article that they have ever run. Why? Because there’s something intuitive within the human heart that wants to believe that this is all not simply a cosmic accident. Just to give you a couple of tiny factoids from that article: There are four basic forces that govern the way the universe operates: gravity, electromagnetism, the weak nuclear force, and the strong nuclear force. As more and more physicists have studied the very nature of the universe, they have recognized that each of those forces must be in perfect proportion. If they are not in perfect proportion, then stars and planets and galaxies cannot exist, but instead everything would collapse in on itself. On top of that, they recognize that these forces must have been in perfect proportion within a millisecond of there being anything existing, or everything would have collapsed. In other words, all of these forces had to be perfectly set in the perfect time, and it didn’t happen on accident. On top of that, there’s this other incredible factoid from the article, whenever Metaxas is writing and he says this: He realizes that more and more physicists have discovered that there are increasing needs to have life existing anywhere in the universe. The more than you discover outer space and you realize how vast and how cold and how lifeless it actually is, for there to be life anywhere in the universe is actually negatively probable. In other words, there are so many factors that need to take place for there to be life existing anywhere at all that it is actually against the odds that anything would exist… yet here we are! We’re here even though the odds say nothing should be here; we’re here even though these incredible amounts of forces have been fine-tuned perfectly, in the perfect way, at the perfect time… all of these things are just little ways that give us the idea that there is indeed a designer behind the universe. And these are the sorts of things, before there was any such thing as physics, that the psalmist declares and says, “O Lord, our Lord; how majestic is your Name in all the earth!” “You don’t have to be a physicist to go outside on a clear night, look up into the sky, see the stars, understand the vastness of the universe, understand just how tiny you are, and say, “Wow, that’s beautiful; that’s incredible. That is huge… and I’m tiny.” I think that it is in that moment, looking out, seeing the rest of the universe, that the psalmist realizes that in the middle of the universe, how large it is, just how crazy it is that God has chosen to show us any sort of love.

In verse 4: “…what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man…” Some translations might say, “…and human beings…” that’s the Hebrew phrase. “Son of man” that just means human. “…that You care for him?” “You see, within the middle of this vastness and diversity out there in the universe, God looked across all of the galaxies that had been created… God looked at all of the stars, all of the planets, all of the galaxies… and chose one galaxy. And in that galaxy He chose one solar system, and in that solar system, and in that solar system He chose one planet… and on that planet He populated it with an innumerable amount of species ranging from beetles to zebras to trout… and in all of those species, He chose one species, on one planet, in one galaxy, in one corner of the universe, and the species that He chose is humanity. Now that’s crazy. It’s not accidental. It is something instead that Scripture tells us, in Ephesians chapter 1, was decided before the very foundations of the earth. The words that appeared on the screen at the beginning of the service today… “God chose you…” are not accidental. They are indeed quite intentional because out of all creation, God chose one aspect of creation within which to place His image. In Genesis 1:27 says this: “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them.” Men and women… Human beings are the only part of creation, the only aspect of creation that bears the full weight of the image of God. They are the only part of creation that was made to have a relationship with the living God. Psalm 33:6 says this: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth, all their host.” Translation: Your God, when He breathes, He breathes out stars… He breathes out super novas… And yet that same God, who is able to breathe out universes at breakfast, also decided to breathe out and make you a reality as well. I want you to think about this… The universe only exists because He chose for it to exist. He didn’t have to
make it. He freely chose, in an incredible act of freedom and in an incredible act of love, to make it. He spoke it into being and then, out of all of that He created, He picked people.

Back to Psalm 8:5: “Yet, You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.” God chose humans to have something significant to do, and to be in the midst of the universe. There is no other species that we can observe that has any sort of delusion that they ought to be in charge. Dolphins are not rising up creating economies. (Laughter) There is no other part of creation that is attempting to say, “I ought to govern my own life.” They simply carry out the functions that have been set to them. But within the heart of humanity, something has been set by the Divine, by God, to say “You are to participate in the Triune Godhead.” Now this is crazy because whenever we think about our own lives and the vastness of the universe and the bigness of our God, we recognize just how tiny we are. You are a speck of dust, you’re a breath, you’re a vapor, you’re a moment, you’re a blink… you’re a snap of the fingers and you are gone. God was here long before you were ever here, and God will continue to be long after you are gone. In fact, in the scope of eternity, our entire universe is simply just a moment… a breath… compared to who our God is. We are nothing. Yet, in the middle of that, God assigns worth to people. There is nothing worthy about humanity intrinsically… inherently. Simply, God decides to look at people and say, “I will make those creatures valuable.” We did not earn the value; He just gave it to us.

Whenever I was a kid, my third-grade teacher would sometimes leave the room, and she would put one of the students in charge. This was a bad plan. But whenever she would do this, she would bring the student up to the front of the room, give them a piece of chalk and say, “I’m going to step out for a few minutes, and if anyone acts up, you write their name on the board.” Does that third-grader have more intuition, more insight, or more maturity than the rest of the other third-graders in the room? No way! They don’t know what in the world they are doing. Why were they there? They only had that worth in that job because the teacher said, “I pick you to have that.” I could reach into my wallet right now and pull out a piece of paper that has green ink on it and some numbers in the corner. Now it really has no value except for the fact that the government of the United States has said, “That thing is worth 20 dollars.” It’s just paper with ink. Why can’t I take my own paper and write “20” in the corners and say, “Hey, would you guys take this and trade it for some goods and services?” No… they don’t want my paper. They want the paper that has been assigned value by the government. Things only have value that have been given the value from those who actually have authority. The one who has the greatest amount of authority… God… has looked across all of time and eternity and has said, “You… humanity. You have value. Not because of anything you have done, but I will declare freely that you now have value.” And God wants that supremely valuable creation… humanity… to now participate in the Triune Godhead. That does not mean that we are gods ourselves. It means, instead, that God has created us with His image on us so that we might have relationship freely with the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). He wanted us to participate in, to have free relationship with Him. That’s how much He decided to love those that He put His image in. He wanted you to know that He had created you for eternal relationship. Our problem is that we said, “Ehhh… I don’t know.” You see, the way that the image of God works is that we are able to freely participate and choose to freely walk into that relationship, but we also have the freedom and the ability to reject that relationship as well. Every person in this room, without exception, has chosen freely to reject the offer of relationship that has been given by our God and by our Creator. We looked at the opportunity to participate in the Triune Godhead, and we said, “That sounds really good, but I’d rather do my own thing.” We rejected the offer that God gave us, which means that we actually decided to set ourselves against God. We rebelled against God. Maybe we weren’t the ones holding the fruit in the Garden ourselves, but we all… each and every one of us… has heard the offer that has been given to us by God, and at one point or another, some of us
actively, even now, have said, “No; I don’t want it.” The Bible calls that rebellion or sin. Taking the offer that had been given to us by God and rejecting that offer. In fact, most of the time at Christmas, we don’t want to talk about that kind of rebellion because we think, “Who cares? I want the presents and the lights and the hot cocoa and the music and ‘Oh, the feelings.’” But instead we have to talk about the rebellion; we have to talk about the sin because actually this is the most important part of the story right now. You see, in our rebellion… in our sin… we actually became God’s enemies. Don’t believe me; listen to the Scripture:

Romans 5:10: “For, if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son… “
Colossians 1:21: “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.”
James 4:4: “Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

We were indeed enemies of God. What does God do to His enemies? Glad you asked. Psalm 68:21 gives a pretty clear picture of what God does to His enemies: “But God will strike the heads of His enemies, the hairy crown of him who walks in his guilty ways.” That’s a song, you guys! (Laughter) (Singing now) “God crush our enemies…” (Laughter) We don’t sing that kind of stuff. We love the hugs and we love the feelings, but we don’t sing about our God being so just and so righteous that He crushes the skulls of those who oppose Him. Nevertheless, that is what the Scripture faithfully teaches over and over and over. It is that He crushes those who are against Him. So what’s the translation? “God crushes the heads of His enemies.” You say, “Wow… Man… that’s bad news.” It gets worse… because that means that God needs to crush my head and your head… Merry Christmas! (Laughter) …Because you are at enmity with the Lord when you rebel against Him.

Now, we arrive at the incredible theological and metaphysical impasse that seems to have no solution. God has freely chosen to create the entire universe and then pick humanity from all of the different aspects of the universe and said, “That one species… I will place My image in those people, and then I will choose to make them the crown of creation, just a little lower than the heavenly beings. I will give them immeasurable worth.” Sounds like a great idea… except we rebel and make ourselves enemies against God, so now He has to destroy us. So He loves us and we’re immeasurably worth something, and then at the same time we have to be wiped out. That’s a problem… except for the fact that God has a solution because He wants to have relationship so that we might participate in the Triune Godhead. If you’ve ever wondered why it is that God has to become human… maybe now you’re beginning to get it. Why does God not become a zebra? Why does God choose not to become a fish? …Because those creatures, although beautiful and intentionally made by God, were never the crown of creation. As much as God loves the zebras and the trout of the world, He never once declared that He put His image in them. He never once said, “Those creatures have My image.” Only it was humanity; therefore God freely came as a human because that Human, Jesus Christ… You see, Jesus existed eternally prior to the Incarnation, and Jesus freely came to earth and took on flesh so that He could demonstrate how we ought to live. God does this because we are a little lower than the heavenly beings, so He descends into our world, taking on flesh, to show us how we ought to have lived. Now this God Man Jesus led a full and a rich human life, but He never once succumbed to the temptations of sin. Make no mistake… He was freely tempted. Hebrews 4:15 says, “We do not have a High Priest…” (talking about Jesus) “…who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.” He never caved. Not in the wilderness when Satan came to Him three different times. He never once caved throughout His entire life. Why was that? Why didn’t He settle a little bit, to go, “Yeah, you know, guys… it is really tough
to be a human." He didn’t sin because He had to be perfect to be the bridge to build the way for you and for me to get relationship to God. In declaring Himself to be God, Jesus… make no mistake… freely declared that He was indeed God. He was executed for blasphemy. He was killed for being God. He was killed for being perfect, for loving, for teaching truth, for never sinning. He was executed. All of those are true, but He was also killed to make peace. You see, it was then in that moment whenever Jesus Christ, God in flesh, hung on the cross, that God did a miracle that supersedes any other miracle that we had seen to this point. He took every bit of sin in the world… all sin… past, present, and future… and all of that sin, He located it in one place… on the human, physical body of Jesus. He put it all right there in that one spot, and then He did what Scripture declares in Psalm 68:21, that He must do to sin: “He crushed it.” He crushed it. Isaiah 53:5 says this: “But He…” (Jesus) “…was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities.” The same word “crushed” used in Psalm 68 is used here again in Isaiah 53:5. In that moment, God took everything and put it all on the body of Jesus and then crushed that physical body so that He could keep His own nature in crucifying but at the same time preserve the nature of love that He has as well. He did the greatest miracle of all time in crushing His own Self. Just as the universe was born in one moment, through one word given by the mouth of God, the universe was reborn in one moment whenever God put all sin there on the body of His Son and then crushed Him.

So what happened? Well, the second half of Isaiah 53:5 is important: “Upon Him…” (Jesus) “…was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.” The chastisement of Jesus brought us peace. We can have peace with God only because of what God did in Jesus. We are enemies with God… we rebel against God… we deserve crushing… We deserve destruction. We only get peace because of what God did in Jesus. His wounds… our healing. A miraculous transference takes place in that moment. And this is what we call the Gospel. If you ever hear me use the word “The Gospel” and you say, “What does that mean?” It means the Good News that in that moment a cosmic switcheroo took place where God took all of the sin of humanity and crushed it on His own Son, in that moment, giving us peace. You see, now God lets us know that He no longer sees us as broken and sinful but instead as righteous. (Clapping) It’s beautiful.

2. Peace With Myself.

Now here’s the next thing. Now we don’t only have peace with God, but we can also now have peace with ourselves. You see, many of us actually are not at peace with ourselves. We hate things about ourselves. Now, I’m not just talking about the way that we look whenever we look in the mirror. I’m talking about addictions, anger, pride, lust, fear, doubt, insecurity… something. Why?

I’d only been pastor at Houston Northwest for about a month and I had an illustration. I brought out a trashcan, and I put it right here. Then I got a half-gallon of Blue Bell ice cream. Does anybody remember this moment? Yeah… I took the lid off and threw it in the trashcan and I took a bite… just to be mean… and then after I did that, I took it and I threw it away, to make a point. How many people were here that day and remember that? How many of you remember what the point was that I was trying to make? It’s a problem. (Laughter) Yeah… You see, sometimes in preaching you actually do too good at making an illustration. For the next three months people would see me in the supermarket and would say, “Are you buying some ice cream to throw it away?” I mean, they were that upset over the fact that I threw away the Blue Bell. But no one remembered the point that I was trying to make. What I realized then was that sometimes, as humans, we actually remember the wrong things. Did you know that one of the problems that we have with having peace with ourselves is that we remember the wrong things. You see, Scripture
He Promises To Give Me Peace | Psalm 8 | December 6, 2015
By Dr. Steve Bezner. Week 2 in the series “Starry Night” - Advent 2015.

says, in Hebrews 8:12: “For I will be merciful toward their iniquities…” Listen to this: “…I will remember their sins no more.” God actually says that He does not remember what you have done. Once you have placed your faith in Christ and the blood of Jesus has been applied to you, you are clean. Our problem is that we keep remembering them. We remember the wrong things and forget the wrong things. That’s why we have to hear the Gospel over and over and over… because we keep remembering our sin, keep remembering our flaws, keep remembering our faults… whenever Jesus has said, “I don’t remember.” We come to the table and say, “Do this in remembrance of Me” …because we need to remember the broken body of Jesus and the spilled blood of Jesus. We don’t need to remember the sin. That doesn’t mean we don’t need to grow and mature and learn from our mistakes. It’s not that. It’s the idea that we keep holding onto things that have been forgotten, forgiven, and placed far away. But we keep grabbing onto them. (Clapping).

The problem that I have, if I’m totally honest, is that oftentimes I look at my salvation like putting lipstick on a pig. It’s taking something that’s pretty ugly and maybe just making it a little bit uglier. (Laughter) You see, that’s not all what salvation is in Christ. Salvation in Christ is washing as white as snow. It’s clean, it’s erased, it’s empty… It’s the righteousness of Christ that is glorious and has come over me and has cast all of my sin into the Lake of Fire. It’s gone… it’s destroyed… it’s obliterated. It is absolutely gone. If you are here right now and you’re holding onto your sin, there are only two options:

1) You’ve never said “Yes” to Jesus Christ, and I’d invite you to do that today so that you can know that your sin can be far away.
2) You are abusing the freedom that God has given you in Christ, and you are remembering the wrong things.

Don’t remember the wrong thing because peace only comes with myself when I practice, as Tim Keller describes it, “self-forgetfulness” which, by the way, is the same path that we walk down to get toward peace with others.

3. Peace With Others.

People oftentimes say, “How do I forgive someone else? How is it that I’m able to actually get to a place where I’m not angry with them… where I’m willing to forgive them?” Well, I think the truth is this. It is that sometimes we use that phrase “forgive and forget” and just kind of throw it around like it’s a cliché. Listen, I don’t even know if I agree with that. If someone has abusive toward you, you shouldn’t forget about that. You ought to protect yourself. Proverbs warns against being a fool and returning to your folly and that kind of stuff. This is what I’m talking about. Whenever it comes time for forgiveness, what we have to do is remember the right thing. The thing that God has called us to remember about anyone who is our enemy is that He desires to save them. That doesn’t mean that He already has. It doesn’t mean that they have forgotten the right thing, but it does mean that He wants it.

This week I had a cup of coffee with the local Muslim imam. That’s a Muslim pastor. He leads the mosque over on Old Louetta. We talked for a little over two hours. He shared with me some insight into Islam. He said, “I’d like to tell you a little bit about Islam.” I said, “Okay, tell me about it.” He said, “Islam has five messengers…” Maybe you already know this. I didn’t know this. “Islam has five messengers. They are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad.” He told me about those five messengers and explained to me why it is that they are significant in the Muslim faith. I listened. He said, “What do you think about that?” I did that thing where you breathe a prayer basically in less than a second… “Holy Spirit, give me
the words.” …and then I said, “Well, you know, it’s funny. Each of those people that you listed, with the exception of Muhammad… each one of them are actually a representation of a covenant that God gives in the Scripture.” I said, “In Noah, there’s a covenant that’s given. It’s represented by the rainbow. And the Hebrew word there for bow is not something beautiful. It’s actually for a weapon that’s hung in the sky with the arrow pointed back up at Himself, to remind us that God took His wrath and placed it on Himself in the person of Jesus Christ.” Then I went onto the next covenant. I talked about Abraham and how God made a covenant with Abraham, but only God appeared between the split animals of Genesis chapter 15 because it’s a one-way covenant that I have no ability to keep. We call that “grace.” Then I moved into the Mosaic covenant, talking about the Law that it is beautiful and good, that God gave to demonstrate His holiness but is so big and so vast that no one could ever be able to live up to that… talking about the fact that every person is under the judgment of sin because no one has lived up to every expectation that God could ever give. Then I said, “You know, there’s actually a fourth that Christians believe that you didn’t mention. It’s King David. It’s a covenant from God in which God says that He will always have someone from his lineage on the throne. We believe that Jesus Christ fulfills that because He is the King of Kings and will be on the throne forever and ever.” So I moved and used those messengers of Christianity and talked about the covenant that was there. When I got done, you know what? He didn’t come to Christ. (Laughter) He didn’t get baptized. But, do you know what? He listened, and he embraced me, and he said, “Could we get together again and talk about these things?” You see, here’s the thing. It’s that many of us look at our enemy, and we refuse to imagine a world in which God wants that person redeemed. God desires the redemption of every individual you have ever locked eyes with because every person that you have ever locked eyes with is created in the very image of God. He wants them. Peter says, “God desires none to perish.” God wants to save every person. You see, the thing is that sometimes, as people have been given the gift of peace… we’re okay with being at peace with ourselves. But we hold onto the peace and instead of extending it to others, we think, “Well, I’ll just live and let live” or just let them do their own thing. “I won’t get in that. That’s none of my business.” When Jesus Christ commanded us to be peace-makers, He was not talking about the Colt 45. Jesus was talking about us entering into the fray, in difficult situations, and sometimes speaking the Gospel to people that it seems impossible to hear it because we believe that peace with one another only comes when we stop seeing one another as enemies. Our church will only be a multiracial, multiethnic church when we stop focusing on the color of skin and on culture and instead saying, “No matter what you look like, you are my brother and my sister in Christ.” (Clapping) We will never be able to have any kind of unity in our city until we stop saying, “You know what? You voted for that person; I voted for that person, but we can all come under the agreement that Scripture is the ultimate authority and we can all be under that. Those are the things that bring unity whenever the Gospel takes precedent. We become peace-makers when we say, “Jesus is the King; not an idea in my heart or in my head, but simply King Jesus.” So now, Church… the question for us today becomes this: “Are you at peace with God?” If the answer is “No,” today you can have peace with God because God sent His Son Jesus, crushed Him for your sin, if you say “Yes.” “Are you at peace with yourself?” If the answer is “No” it’s because you’re probably holding onto things that Jesus long ago paid the price for and that God has already declared, in Hebrews 8:12, that He forgot. “Are you not at peace with those around you? Are you finding enemies with people that God actually wants to redeem?” You say, “Well, Steve; they want to kill me.” Maybe… maybe so. He never promised that it would be safe or easy, but He did promise that He would never leave us, He would never forsake us, and Immanuel means “God is with us.” What will we do with the peace that God has given? Will we hold it tight or will we set it free?
Let’s pray. “Lord Jesus, You have made a way. You have given us everything that we need. You have given us actually more than we would ever need because we have You. You are beyond anything. Thank you, God. Lord, I want to pray right now for people that are in this room that are trying to figure out what it is that they’re supposed to do with this information. Lord, I want to pray first of all for the people that are here who are saying, ‘I don’t know if I’ve ever said “Yes” to Jesus.’”

If you’re here right now… nobody is looking around… everybody has got their head bowed. I just want to pray right now. If you say, “You know what? I need to say ‘Yes’ to Jesus today”… would you raise your hand? I just want to pray for you. Raise it up where I can see it. Okay. If you’re here and you say, “Steve, I need to raise my hand because I need prayer because I need to be at peace with myself; I’m remembering things that God has already forgiven and forgotten.” Would you just raise your hand? I want to pray for you. Okay. Raise them up where I can see them. If you say, “Hey, do you know what, Steve? I’m angry with people. I need to be a peace-maker instead of holding a grudge.” If that’s you, I want to pray for you. Would you raise up your hand so I can pray for you? Thank you. You can put them all down.

“Lord, thank you that Your Gospel is powerful and still relevant and moving in hearts even right now. God, I thank you. I praise you. In Jesus Name, Amen.”