



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

June 18, 2017

Discussion Guide

FAITHFUL COMMITMENT

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD "PEACE" WHAT COMES TO MIND? IN YOUR MIND, WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO LIVE A PEACEFUL LIFE?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, DISCUSS THE CONCEPT OF PEACE WITHIN SCRIPTURE.
- READ COLOSSIANS 1.15-20 OUT LOUD. READ THE

TEXT ONCE MORE.

- ACCORDING TO PAUL, IN WHAT WAYS AND OVER WHAT THINGS IS JESUS SUPREME? SEEK TO DISCOVER AS MANY AS POSSIBLE IN THE TEXT.
- WHAT MIGHT, IF ANY, IMPLICATIONS FOR LIFE MIGHT THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS HAVE?
- IF JESUS IS SUPREME OVER ALL THINGS, THEN, IN HIM, WE HAVE THE SUPREME EXAMPLE OF HOW TO LIVE AND DO THE WORK OF GOD. ACCORDING TO PAUL, WHAT IS THIS EXAMPLE? HOW DID JESUS LIVE AND DO THE WORK OF HIS FATHER?
- ONE OF THE ASPECTS OF THE LIFE JESUS LIVED DOING HIS FATHER'S WORK WAS THE PURSUIT OF PEACE. WHAT DID THIS LOOK LIKE IN HIS LIFE? WHAT WERE THE EFFECTS?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO PURSUE PEACE AS A MEANS OF DOING THE WORK OF GOD?
- WHERE, IF AT ALL, DO YOU SEE PEOPLE PURSUING PEACE AS A MEANS OF DOING THE WORK OF GOD? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO PURSUE PEACE IN OUR GROUP? IN OUR COMMUNITY? WHAT, IF ANYTHING, KEEPS US FROM LIVING IN THIS MANNER?
- CONSIDER CLOSING IN PRAYER, OFFERING YOUR LIVES AS INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

PEACE

IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, PEACE WAS MOST OFTEN THOUGHT OF AS THE ANTITHESIS TO WAR, OR EVEN AS THE CESSATION OF WAR. AT TIMES, AS WITH THE CONCEPT OF THE *PAX ROMANA*, PEACE WAS UNDERSTOOD TO BE A STATE OF LAW AND ORDER WHICH GAVE RISE TO THE BLESSINGS OF PROSPERITY. WHILE VARIATIONS OF THESE IDEAS CAN BE FOUND THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, THE PRIMARY CONCEPT OF PEACE WITHIN SCRIPTURE IS VERY DIFFERENT.

IN THE ANCIENT TRANSLATION OF THE HEBREW BIBLE INTO GREEK (THE SEPTUAGINT—LXX), THE WORD CHOSEN TO TRANSLATE SHALOM WAS THE WORD FOR PEACE, FOREVER LINKING THE CONCEPT OF SHALOM WITH THE WORD FOR PEACE IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS. SHALOM IS A HEBREW WORD WHICH REFERS TO WELL-BEING OR WHOLENESS, A STATE OF COMPLETENESS WHICH COMES FROM GOD. THIS WHOLENESS COULD BE EXPERIENCED BY A NATION (2 SAMUEL 11.7) OR AN INDIVIDUAL, BUT GOD IS ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE SOURCE OF PEACE (JUDGES 6.24; PSALM 4.8; 29.10-11; 37.11; 119.165). THROUGHOUT THE PROPHETS, PEACE/SHALOM WAS PROCLAIMED TO BE MORE THAN A BLESSED STATE, BUT THE INTENDED STATE TO WHICH GOD WAS MOVING ALL OF CREATION (ISAIAH 9.5-6; 26.12; NAHUM 2.1; EZEKIEL 34.25; ZECHARIAH 6.13). THEREFORE, WHEN THE HEBREW PEOPLE GREETED ONE ANOTHER BY SAYING “SHALOM,” THEY WERE IN FACT WISHING THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD’S REDEMPTION FOR THE OTHER PERSON, AND ACCORDING TO THE RABBIS, TO SEEK PEACE WAS TO REMOVE ALL OBSTACLES TO THE REDEMPTIVE EXPERIENCE OF SHALOM.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE CONCEPT OF PEACE REMAINS TIGHTLY LINKED WITH THE CONCEPT OF SHALOM. ACROSS THE PAGES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, PEACE IS PICTURED AS A GIFT OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST (JOHN 14.27; 16.33; ROMANS 5.1; PHILIPPIANS 4.7). FURTHER, PEACE IS HELD FORTH AS THE REDEMPTIVE STATE TO WHICH GOD IS MOVING CREATION THROUGH CHRIST (LUKE 1.79; 2.14; MARK 5.34; 9.50; COLOSSIANS 1.20; 2 CORINTHIANS 5.17; GALATIANS 6.15). THEREFORE, IT IS POSSIBLE TO REFER TO THE GOSPEL IN TERMS OF PEACE (ACTS 10.36; EPHESIANS 6.15). BECAUSE PEACE IS THE REDEMPTIVE STATE GOD INTENDS FOR PEOPLE, HIS KINGDOM IS ONE OF PEACE (ROMANS 14.17), AND THOSE WHO LIVE WITHIN THIS KINGDOM ARE MARKED BY AND SEEK AFTER PEACE (GALATIANS 5.22; MATTHEW 5.9).

THE TEXT

COLOSSIANS 1.15-20: *THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS*

PAUL’S LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE IS A LETTER WRITTEN TO A CHURCH PAUL DID NOT START (COLOSSIANS 1.7-8). HOWEVER, THEIR PASTOR, EPAPHRAS, HAS REACHED OUT TO PAUL IN ORDER TO ADDRESS A GROWING PROBLEM WHICH APPEARS TO BE THE SEEDS OF WHAT WOULD BECOME THE HERESY OF GNOSTICISM IN THE SECOND CENTURY. GNOSTICISM WAS A LOOSE SYSTEM OF BELIEFS WHICH WERE MADE UP ELEMENTS FROM THE GOSPEL, THE TEACHING OF PLATO, AND ANCIENT MYSTERY RELIGIONS. MOST OFTEN, GNOSTICS MADE A STARK DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE PHYSICAL WORLD AND THE SPIRITUAL WORLD WHICH LED TO HERETICAL VIEWS REGARDING THE NATURE OF JESUS, REJECTING EITHER HIS DIVINITY OR HIS HUMANITY. IN THIS LETTER, PAUL APPEARS TO BE ADDRESSING THOSE WHO QUESTION THE DIVINE NATURE OF JESUS, BUT THIS VIEW IS BUILT ON A MIRROR-READING OF THE TEXT WHICH LACKS THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CONVERSATION. REGARDLESS OF THE EXACT VIEWPOINT, IN COLOSSIANS, PAUL LABORS TO PRESENT JESUS WHICH HONORS BOTH HIS HUMAN AND DIVINE NATURES CREATING SOME OF THE MOST CLEAR AND BEAUTIFUL CHRISTOLOGY IN THE ENTIRE NEW TESTAMENT. ONE MIGHT UNDERSTAND THE LETTER TO BE A CLARIFICATION OF WHO JESUS IS, WHAT HE DID, AND WHAT THIS MEANS FOR CREATION.

PAUL BEGINS THE LETTER BY INTRODUCING HIMSELF TO THE COLOSSIANS, NOTING THAT HE PRAYS FOR THEM (COLOSSIANS 1.1-14). HOWEVER, PAUL’S PRAYER FOR THEM CONCERNS COMING TO KNOW GOD’S AND HIS WILL MADE APPARENT THROUGH THE PERSON OF JESUS. WITH THIS PRAYER, THE QUESTION WHICH COMES TO THE FORE CONCERNS THE IDENTITY OF JESUS. PAUL’S ANSWER IS THAT JESUS IS SUPREME, THE ONE WHO STANDS OVER BOTH CREATION AND THE NEW CREATION.

PAUL STATES THAT JESUS IS THE IMAGE OF THE GOD WHO CANNOT BE SEEN; THAT IS, IN JESUS WE SEE AND EXPERIENCE MOST CLEARLY WHO GOD IS. HOWEVER, HE IS ALSO ONE WHO STANDS OVER CREATION AS THE ONE WHO HAS ALL RIGHTS AND AUTHORITY AS A FIRST-BORN SON. THE HERETIC ARIUS (CLERGYMAN IN ALEXANDRIA EGYPT IN 4TH CENTURY A.D.) TOOK THIS PHRASE REGARDING JESUS’ SON-SHIP TO MEAN THAT JESUS WAS A CREATED BEING WHO WAS DIVINE AND YET OF A DIFFERENT SUBSTANCE THAN GOD. ARIUS’ INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE WAS HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY GNOSTIC TEACHING. HOWEVER, PAUL’S POINT IS NOT TO DISCUSS JESUS’ ORIGIN BUT HIS STATUS. ATHANASIUS, THE BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA, STRONGLY REFUTED THIS TEACHING, BUT IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE COUNCIL OF NICEA

(325 A.D.) THAT THIS HERESY WAS FORMALLY ADDRESSED WITH THE NICEAN CREED (325 A.D.) WHICH CLARIFIED THAT JESUS WAS OF THE SAME SUBSTANCE AS GOD AND THEREFORE WAS NOT A CREATED BEING.

PAUL NOTES THAT JESUS IS SUPREME OVER CREATION BECAUSE HE CREATED ALL THINGS, SEEN, UNSEEN, HEAVENLY, EARTHLY, SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL. FURTHER, HE CREATED THEM FOR HIMSELF, MOST LIKELY A REFERENCE TO THE PURPOSE OF CREATION BEING THE GLORIFICATION OF GOD. AS THE ONE WHO CREATED ALL THINGS FOR HIMSELF, HE STANDS BEFORE THEM AS SUPREME AND AS THE ONE WHO HOLDS CREATION ITSELF TOGETHER. HERE PAUL RELIES HEAVILY UPON THE JEWISH UNDERSTANDING OF CREATION (GENESIS 1-2). IN GENESIS, GOD CREATES BY SPEAKING CREATION INTO BEING (GENESIS 1.3). IN THE JEWISH UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF GOD, GOD'S VOICE WAS NOT SEPARATE FROM GOD BUT AN EXTENSION OF HIS PERSON (ISAIAH 55.11). THUS, FOR GOD TO SPEAK WAS FOR GOD TO ACT. THIS UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S VOICE BEING AN EXTENSION OF GOD STANDS BEHIND JOHN'S PROLOGUE TO HIS GOSPEL WHERE HE NOTES THAT THE WORD (VOICE OF GOD) WAS BOTH WITH GOD AND WAS GOD IN THE CREATIVE EVENT. FURTHER, JOHN CLAIMS THAT IT IS THIS WORD (VOICE OF GOD) WHICH TOOK ON FLESH. IT IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND WHY JOHN AND OTHERS MIGHT ARGUE THAT THE ASPECT/PERSON OF GOD WHICH TOOK ON FLESH WAS THE WORD/VOICE OF GOD BECAUSE IT WAS THEIR UNDERSTANDING THAT IT WAS THIS PART OF GOD WHICH DID THE WORK OF GOD. WE FIND THIS SAME THINKING BEHIND PAUL'S STATEMENT HERE ABOUT JESUS. AS THE ONE WHO ACCOMPLISHES THE WORK OF GOD, IN PAUL'S MIND, JESUS IS THEREFORE THE WORD WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT CREATION. TO CREATE IS TO BY DEFINITION BE OVER ONE'S CREATION.

WHILE PAUL'S PRIMARY POINT IS TO UNDERScore THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS OVER CREATION, IT IS HARD TO MISS THE TIE TO HUMANITY PAUL MAKES WITH HIS USE OF THE WORD "IMAGE." IN GOD'S CREATION, PEOPLE ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE (GENESIS 1.26-27), A TRAIT WHICH INVOLVES THEM SERVING AS GOD'S FAITHFUL PRESENCE, EXERCISING CONTROL OVER CREATION (GENESIS 1.28). THEREFORE, JESUS' SUPREMACY OVER CREATION INVOLVES NOT JUST HIS LORDSHIP BUT THE PRIMACY OF HIS EXAMPLE AS TO THE NATURE OF WHAT IT IS TO BE FULLY HUMAN BECAUSE IN HIM ONE SEES THE IMAGE OF GOD WHICH WORKS OUT IN THE CONTROL OF CREATION.

PAUL DOES NOT STOP WITH CREATION BECAUSE GOD WAS IN THE PROCESS OF REDEEMING/RESTORING CREATION. IF JESUS

IS SUPREME OVER CREATION, IS HE ALSO SUPREME OVER GOD'S RE-CREATION? PAUL ANSWERS AFFIRMATIVELY. JESUS IS THE HEAD (SUPREME) OVER HIS BODY IN THE WORLD WHICH IS THE CHURCH. HE IS OVER THE CHURCH BECAUSE IN HIM WE FIND THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH, THE BEGINNING OF A NEW WAY OF LIFE, A WAY OF LIFE WHICH DEFEATS DEATH. THEREFORE, JESUS IS ALSO SUPREME OVER GOD'S NEW CREATION THEREBY MAKING HIM SUPREME OVER ALL THINGS. THIS NEW CREATION CAME ABOUT AS GOD WAS PLEASED TO ALLOW HIS FULLNESS (FULL BEING) TO BECOME FLESH IN THE PERSON OF JESUS AND THROUGH HIS BODY TO RECONCILE THE ENTIRETY OF CREATION TO HIMSELF BY MAKING PEACE THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS ON THE CROSS.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT HERE, PAUL ALSO TIES HIS COMMENTS TO HUMANITY, IN THIS CASE, NEW HUMANITY. HE DOES THIS BY SAYING JESUS IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH. THIS MEANS THAT JESUS IS NOT SIMPLY IN CHARGE BUT HE DETERMINES THE WAY THE CHURCH SHOULD GO. FURTHER, AS THE BEGINNING, HE DEMONSTRATES THE WAY LIFE IS TO BE LIVED. IN HIS BODY THIS LIFE IS ABOUT LIVING AS THE IMAGE OF GOD IN ORDER TO SEEK RECONCILIATION BY MAKING PEACE IN THE WORLD. IT IS HARD TO MISS THE ECHOES OF 2 CORINTHIANS 5.14-6.1. WITH RESPECT TO NEW HUMANITY, JESUS DEMONSTRATES THAT PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE GOD'S NEW CREATION ARE ABOUT LIVING AS GOD'S IMAGE, SEEKING THE RECONCILIATION OF ALL CREATION BY MAKING PEACE. IN THIS CONTEXT, PEACE INVOLVES MORE THAN AN ABSENCE OF HOSTILITY, BUT PEACE IS WHOLENESS OR COMPLETENESS WHICH COMES FROM GOD. ONE MIGHT THINK IN TERMS OF ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD BEING MADE WHOLE, BUT WITH THE REFERENCE TO THE ENTIRETY OF CREATION, PAUL SEEMS TO HAVE MORE IN MIND. PAUL SEEMS TO UNDERSTAND THE LARGER NATURE OF JESUS' MINISTRY WHICH WAS TO MAKE PEOPLE AND CREATION WHOLE (LUKE 4.16-19). THEREFORE, TO MAKE PEACE IS TO LIVE LIFE IN SUCH A WAY THAT CREATION AND PEOPLE ARE RESTORED, A RESTORATION WHICH INCLUDES ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, BUT TOUCHES ON EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE AND NATURE.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

WE ARE GOD'S FAITHFUL PRESENCE, DOING HIS WORK, HIS WAY IN THE WORLD. HIS WORK IS TO BRING HIMSELF GLORY. THIS HAS BEEN GOD'S PURPOSE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING BECAUSE IT IS THE PURSUIT OF GOD'S GLORY WHICH IS BEST FOR CREATION. BUT, JUST HOW DO WE WORK TO BRING GOD GLORY? I GET HOW I CAN SEEK GOD'S GLORY, BUT HOW DO I WORK TO LEAD CREATION AND PEOPLE WITHIN IT TO SEEK GOD'S GLORY? SOMEHOW, WALKING UP TO SOMEONE AND SAYING, "HEY, YOU SHOULD GLORIFY GOD" JUST DOESN'T SEEM LIKE IT WILL HAVE AMAZING RESULTS. SO HOW DO I DO IT?

I AM COMING TO REALIZE THAT WHENEVER I WANT TO KNOW HOW TO LIVE RIGHTLY, I NEED TO LOOK TO JESUS. IN JESUS, WE SEE WHAT IT IS TO BE TRULY HUMAN, BOTH WITHIN CREATION AND WITHIN GOD'S NEW CREATION. SO, HOW DID JESUS WORK FOR GOD'S GLORY? HE DID IT BY WORKING FOR PEACE. JESUS LIVED AS GOD'S FAITHFUL PRESENCE, DOING THE WORK OF REDEMPTION BY WORKING FOR PEACE. CERTAINLY, THIS WORK INCLUDED INTRODUCING PEOPLE TO GOD, BUT IF WE PAY ATTENTION, THIS WORKING FOR PEACE INVOLVED TURNING PEOPLE TO GOD BY WORKING FIRST FOR PEACE IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE. JESUS HEALED THE SICK. HE GAVE SIGHT TO THE BLIND. HE RAISED THE DEAD. EVERYWHERE JESUS WENT, HE BROUGHT WHOLENESS TO THE LIVES OF PEOPLE. HE BROUGHT PEACE. JESUS DIDN'T JUST BRING PEACE TO PEOPLE. HE BROUGHT IT TO CREATION, SPEAKING TO A STORM, TELLING IT TO BE AT PEACE (MARK 4.39). THIS IS WHERE JESUS STARTED. HE GAVE SMALL TASTES OF THE PEACE GOD INTENDED. WHEN HE DID, PEOPLE GAVE HIM AN EAR AND HEARD HIM SPEAK OF THE FULLNESS OF PEACE FOUND IN A LIFE FULLY ORIENTED AROUND GOD.

I THINK THAT I OFTEN MAKE ENGAGING THE WORLD, LEADING IT TO SEEK THE GLORY OF GOD MORE COMPLICATED THAN IT IS. I WORRY ABOUT HAVING THE RIGHT WORDS OR BEING ABLE TO "PROVE" GOD EXISTS. REALLY, LEADING PEOPLE TO SEEK THE GLORY OF GOD IS NOT ABOUT HAVING THE RIGHT WORDS OR BEING ABLE TO PROVE ANYTHING. LEADING PEOPLE TO SEEK THE GLORY OF GOD IS TO ACT LIKE JESUS, TO GIVE PEOPLE SMALL TASTES OF PEACE. IT IS TO SEEK THE HEALING OF THEIR HEARTS, THEIR MARRIAGES, TO MEET NEEDS AND GIVE FRIENDSHIP. IT IS TO GIVE PEOPLE A TASTE OF THE WHOLENESS GOD INTENDS, AND IN SO DOING PEOPLE SEE THAT GOD IS GOOD, AND THEIR HEARTS SOFTEN AND TURN TO HIM.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WE ARE GOD'S FAITHFUL PRESENCE, DOING HIS WORK, HIS WAY IN THE WORLD. HIS WORK IS TO GLORIFY HIMSELF, BUT HOW DOES THAT WORK OUT FOR US? HOW DO WE WORK TO LEAD OTHERS TO GLORIFY GOD? HOW DID JESUS DO IT? HE WENT ABOUT GIVING PEOPLE REASONS TO TURN TO GOD. HE WENT ABOUT SEEKING PEACE, GRANTING WHOLENESS TO LIVES AND CREATION. IT WAS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF WHOLENESS THAT PEOPLE WERE WILLING AND ABLE TO CONSIDER TURNING AND GLORIFYING GOD. THEY SIMPLY HAD TO HAVE A REASON TO GLORIFY GOD. THEY HAD TO KNOW, IF EVEN IN A SMALL WAY, THE LIFE GOD WAS SEEKING TO PROVIDE TO THEM, A LIFE OF PEACE. THIS WEEK, CONSIDER WAYS IN WHICH YOU MIGHT WORK FOR PEACE IN THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND YOU. WHERE ARE THINGS OR PEOPLE BROKEN? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO ADDRESS THESE? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO GIVE PEOPLE A TASTE OF PEACE? DON'T THINK THAT IN A SINGLE ACTION PEOPLE WILL NECESSARILY TURN AND GLORIFY GOD. THIS CAN TAKE TIME. SIMPLY WORK FOR PEACE AND CONSIDER HOW THIS FEELS. TALK TO GOD ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE DONE AND ASK FOR GUIDANCE FOR THE NEXT STEP, PRAYING THAT GOD WILL THROUGH PEACE LEAD PEOPLE TO SEEK HIS GLORY.



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