



Peace in Conflict?

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Good afternoon. It is such an honor, and a privilege, and a pleasure to be with you this afternoon in that you've given me, and all of us, your time. It is something you're not getting more of. It's one of the things you can't make more of. You can make more money. You can make more products. You can make more problems, but you can't make more time. And so that you've given it to us, is such a generous offer.

Your excellencies, members of Parliament, special guests, thank you so much for this honor. And thank you also to Darlene and your team at Christian Embassy for bringing me here for this special setting.

I want to get right into it if I can. It's a very tough subject. It's a very heavy subject. But it's something that I want to offer to you from a Christian perspective—from my perspective as a Christian, who has been all over the world in various places and heard the various voices that cry out in the middle of all the conflict that's going on in the world.

As I begin this, I think about the attraction at the United Nations building. Now maybe you've been there and you've seen this particular exhibit at the UN building. It's called the *Golden Rule Mosaic*. When you go to the United Nations, there's this mosaic made of stone. It's based on a painting by the American artist, Norman Rockwell. And this painting is a depiction of people from different religious backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds and social strata, who are standing shoulder to shoulder in various poses of contemplation, or prayer, or smiling, or interacting with each other. And it's this idea of unity, despite our big differences. And etched right into the mosaic, right into the very fabric, or the stone of the mosaic, are the words, "Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you."

The idea of unity is becoming more and more eroded as time goes on, as humanity seems to have lost its humanity.

So the mosaic is called the *Golden Rule Mosaic*. Now it's interesting, the *Golden Rule* is one of these things that we hear all the time. And it's across cultures. Like I said, I've been to numerous continents, numerous countries. And there's a familiarity with this idea of the *Golden Rule*; of "doing unto others as you would have them do unto you." And there's just different versions of this. And we'll get to that shortly.

But what's interesting about the *Golden Rule Mosaic* at the UN building, is that it became cracked. Now that's poetry. The idea that we want to do unto others, that there's this picture of unity, became so cracked, that it was in need of restoration. I think this is a poetic picture of what's going on in our world today, as the idea of unity is becoming more and more eroded as time goes on, as humanity seems to have lost its humanity.

Now the mosaic was eventually restored. And the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations at the time—Jan Eliasson at the rededication ceremony—was talking about the *Golden Rule* and the mosaic itself. And he said this about the *Golden Rule*. He says that it reflects the very essence of our mission, as set out in our charter. At its core, the work of the UN, based on the *Golden Rule*, is about narrowing the gap between the world as it is, and the world as we want it to be. The idea here is to narrow the gap between the world as it is, and the world as we want it to be.

The Golden Rule: “Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.”

Now we sometimes forget, because we're so familiar with the *Golden Rule*, where this actually comes from. And there's various versions, as I said before, of the *Golden Rule* in various different cultures and in various different religious settings. It's a particular framing of the *Golden Rule* that we see in the UN. And it's on the hearts and minds of so many people all around the world. It's found on the lips of Jesus of Nazareth, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

We see this in Matthew chapter 7 verse 12, where He says this: "So in everything, do to others, what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets."

Narrowing the gap between the world as it is, and the world that we want?

You know, it's interesting. This idea of *doing for others as you would have them do unto you*, forms the foundation of how the UN and all of us in our various spheres of work—whether it's legislative, whether it is part of the diplomatic corps, whether it's part of the businesses you're involved in, whatever it might be—we're trying to narrow the gap between the world as it is, and the world that we want.

We're trying to get rid of these conflicts. But as you look around and you see the despair that's happening and the strife that's happening in our world at a breakneck pace, the gap is not getting narrower, the gap is getting wider. The cracks are getting wider.

“God whispers to us in our pleasure. He speaks to us in our conscience. But He shouts to us in our pain. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” – C.S. Lewis

As I see this, I think of C.S. Lewis' words, so powerfully written in his book, [The Problem of Pain](#). He talks about when we experience pain, what is it that we're actually experiencing? What is God possibly doing in the midst of all of the pain? He says this:

“God whispers to us in our pleasure. He speaks to us in our conscience. But He shouts to us in our pain. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

Do you hear what he's saying? He's saying, “God whispers to us in our pleasure.” Sometimes we get blessings from Him, or we see things and we don't think [about] the big questions. There's only a whisper. He speaks to us in our conscience when we're alone with our thoughts. But He shouts to us in our pain. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Have you ever heard anybody who has won the *Powerball* or the *Lotto*, or the millions and millions of dollars available in these various jackpots and sweepstakes, ever fall to their knees and ask the big questions of life? No one ever falls to their knees and says, "Why God, why?!" when they win a million dollars. They ask the big questions when pain comes. For some reason, pain is the megaphone.

Three facets of the human experience arise from every form of conflict: sorrow,
justice and love.

And in this world right now, where so much pain is prevalent—despite all of our advancements and our technology—pain is so prevalent. In the megaphone that we're hearing, are three facets. Three facets that arise—I think—from every form of conflict. Whether it's violent conflict, or some kind of relational conflict, there are three facets of the human experience: sorrow, justice and love. Sorrow, justice and love; the three facets.

We hear the cries of sorrow. No matter what context, you find someone who's losing something. Someone has lost life. Someone has lost loved ones. Someone has lost property. Someone has lost their sovereignty, their dignity, their economy, their freedom and that loss breeds a cry of sorrow.

And then in the middle of all that loss, there's a demand for the rectification of that loss. Because *those lousy so-and-sos*—whoever they happen to be—*have done this to us*. And so we demand justice. Sorrow leading to justice; we demand justice be done and things be set right.

And then when justice is not served, when the sorrow is not fulfilled and rectified, there's the question of love. We ask the question. No matter what your context might be—your country, your culture, your religion, whatever it might be. Does the international community really love us? Or are we pawns in the game? Does God even love us if He lets this stuff happen to us time and time again?

Sorrow, justice and love. Everyone cries out for an end to their sorrow, for justice to
be done and for love to be shared.

Sorrow, justice and love. Everyone cries out for an end to their sorrow, for justice to be done and for love to be shared. Regardless of your country of origin, regardless of your religious beliefs, everyone cries out for this. And everyone, by the way, who cries out for this, thinks *they're* right. Everyone thinks that *they're* the ones who have been the victims. Everyone thinks that *they* are the ones—whatever *they* are, by the way, and *they* by the way, is never us. *They* should be brought to justice. And we want to know about love.

They and us—the gap is widening, not narrowing. And so the cries of sorrow, justice and love continue unabated, even as the world cries out for peace.

And so conflict continues unabated. Because *we're* always right. *They're* always wrong. *They and us—the gap is widening, not narrowing—it's widening. And so the cries of sorrow, justice and love continue unabated, even as the world cries out for peace.*

But what is this peace? I think oftentimes we misdefine this thing called peace. We think it's really the absence of violence, or the absence of conflict, or the absence of aggression. I want to suggest to you that this isn't really the true definition of peace, at least not the foundational definition of peace. We think of it in these cliché terms, or I would say superficial terms. While they have big important issues, you know, in terms of aggression and all these things, we need to get back down to what fundamentally peace is really all about. We've gotten to a cliché version of this.

So I want to give you an illustration from an American movie. You might not have seen it. If you haven't seen it, don't worry. It's okay. If you miss it. It's not that great. But it's a comedy movie. It's a funny movie called *Miss Congeniality*. Now in this movie—it's based around a beauty pageant. And the plot centers around a beauty pageant. And you know, these beauty pageants, where you have a *Miss America*, *Miss Universe*, *Miss ___*—whatever, name your country. There's a pageant for this kind of thing.

You know that they're basically contests. They're beauty contests, but they're also featuring people who are giving their poise and their presence. And so it's not just about superficial beauty on the outside, but what's beautiful on the inside for a person. And the person who plays the main character in this movie is very beautiful on the outside, but not poised in any way, shape, or form. She always speaks her mind in the most rude, crass and sort of bombastic way possible, but she's a part of this beauty contest.

Now you know in these contests, there's always this part of the beauty contest, or the pageant, where they ask the contestants questions. And they ask them a question on some societal issue; some big cultural issue. And they usually give a very cliché, one sentence answer.

So in the movie, they show this scene where all the women who are part of the pageant are answering the question and they only show the answer. They don't give you the question at first. And so, contestants after contestants say, *world peace*. Then the next question comes up. And then the last one says, *world peace*. And *world peace*. And every time a contestant answers with the words, *world peace*, the audience stands to their feet and claps in standing ovations because of the phrase *world peace*.

And finally it comes to Sandra Bullock's character—the main character—and you finally find out what the question actually is being asked. And the question is, "What is the one thing our society really needs?"

And she picks up the microphone and she says, "Tougher sentencing for parole violators."

And there's a hush. No one in the audience claps. Everyone is stunned. And she realizes her blunder, and she says, "...and...world peace!"

And everyone stands to their feet and claps in adoration for the answer. They're looking for the cliché. They're looking for the cliché answer, because world peace has become such a lofty idea and unattainable thing, that we've relegated it now to the comedies.

May I suggest to you that the ancients did not see world peace this way. They did not see peace as merely the absence of conflict, or the absence of aggression, or the absence of violence.

Peace, shalom, salaam, eiríni isn't merely the absence of strife, or violence. It is wholeness, reconciliation. To have true peace is to have the sense of being made whole once again.

No, they saw peace as something that was about reconciliation. Something about being made whole. You know when you look at the way the ancients describe this, in their very words: the Hebrew word *shalom*, the Arabic word—which shares as its root, the same root because they're both Semitic languages—*salaam*, and the Greek word—found in the New Testament—*eiríni*. These words from different cultures—in different forms and in different aspects—they don't mean the absence of conflict. They don't mean merely the absence of strife, or violence. What they mean is *wholeness*. What they mean is *reconciliation*. That's what they mean. And so to have true peace is to have the sense of *being made whole once again*.

"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid." – Jesus

Now I want to take you to a story in the Bible. In John chapter 14, there's this story. Now the context of the story is that Jesus is with His closest followers, His disciples. And Jesus is about to undergo

unspeakable violence. He knows it's coming. He's predicted it. He knows He's going to be betrayed by one of His very best friends into the hands of wicked men. And those wicked men are going to torture Him to death, and then put Him on a Roman cross. And the crucifixion was the most heinous way, the most excruciating way the Romans could devise for someone to die in a humiliating fashion. And He knew it was coming within hours of the Last Supper He's having with His closest friends. So He knows violence is coming. And amidst that knowledge that the violence is coming, Jesus says:

"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid."

That's fascinating, because if peace is simply the absence of conflict—the absence of violence—the only person in that room who shouldn't have had peace, would have been Jesus, because He knows the violence is coming. And yet He has something that the world does not give. In His own words, He has peace.

The only peace amidst conflict is the kind of peace that doesn't depend on the lack of conflict; it's that *pure, whole, complete* relationship with the Father that no violence or injustice can take away.

What is the peace He's talking about? It can't be freedom from violence. It has to be the relationship He has with the Father. That *pure, whole, complete, salaam, shalom, eirini*. And He offers that to His disciples. He's the only one who shouldn't have had peace, but He had peace left over to give.

You see, that relationship He has with the Father is something so whole, that no violence and no injustice on this planet could take it away from Him. And He suffered on the cross for our sake, so that we can have the *shalom*, the *salaam*, the *eirini*. He suffered so that we can have that peace with God—a peace that no violence, no injustice and no sorrow can take away from us in this world. The only peace amidst conflict is the kind of peace that doesn't depend on the lack of conflict; it's that relationship. Jesus offers us that wholeness in the midst of the conflicts we experience, even in our day.

You know the Bible sometimes is chided as this book that's this irrelevant relic from a time gone by, that has no relevance to us today. And I would challenge that on many, many different levels. One specific story in the Bible I want to share with you, is one of the deepest encounters you'll ever read in Holy Scripture—one of the deepest encounters is found in John chapter four. If you read anything from the Bible in the next week or so—I pray you do it today—read John chapter four. I won't go into the details. They're quite lengthy and time doesn't permit, but it's one of the most profound encounters you'll ever see in the Bible.

It's when Jesus—the Jewish man, the Jewish prophet—ends up encountering a Samaritan woman. This is important, friends, because, historically speaking, the Samaritans and the Jews hated each other.

There was ethnic tension between them. There was religious tension between them. There was geographical tension between them. Whose land is this? Is this your land? Is it our land? Are you doing something wrong with this? Did you take over? Or did you take over? Everyone's mad at everybody else for ethnic reasons, for religious reasons, for land reasons. And for power reasons.

Does that sound familiar to you?

Outdated book? And yet this woman comes to this encounter with Jesus and she brings up every one of those things. And what does He do? He doesn't sidestep them. He addresses them. But He says, "These issues of land, power, ethnicity and religion...All these places...worship here, don't worship here, do this, do it this way...You say this, we say that."

He says, "All of that stuff? None of that gets you into heaven. None of that reconciles you with God, who is your Maker."

All of that can either be resolved one day, in the providence of God, but if you focus on it, it won't give you peace.

Our fundamental conflict is with the evil in our own hearts.

You see our fundamental conflict is with the evil in our own hearts. As He exposes this in her—and He exposes this so well, as He begins to unmask all the issues that she has—this woman comes to see Him as the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

And then she rushes away from that place, goes back to her Samaritan village—remember, a village that hates Jews. And something she says to these people is so exciting to them, that *they*—the Samaritan village, the *entire* village—spend three days with this Jewish man, who they should hate, and all of His disciples, who they should hate. And they spend three days with Him, learning from Him. And then they tell the woman, "We have come to believe that this man is the Savior of the world." That is a miracle.

What does it mean for Jesus to be the Savior of the world that gives us that reconciliation?

If that reconciliation—that *eiríni*, that *salaam*, that *shalom*—can happen in that particular moment because of the person of Jesus, maybe it can happen today. They said, "He is the Savior of the world."

But what does it mean for Him to be the Savior of the world that gives us that reconciliation? You see friends, that reconciliation came at a price. It comes at a price. They looked forward to a time when He would actually pay the price. But He does.

The crux of the matter: the crucifixion of Jesus is where everything converges; where the innocent One experiences the sorrow of what it means to be forsaken by God.

You know I find it absolutely fascinating. I'm a big fan of the way language actually works. And the word *crucifixion* has as its root word, the Latin word *crux*. And we get this phrase we use all the time in English: *the crux of the matter*, *the crux of the lever*, whatever it is. It's the place where things come together; where they converge. That's the *crux*.

And the crucifixion of Jesus as a historical fact, is where everything converges. You see, it was on that cross that the innocent One, the One with the perfect relationship with God the Father, experiences the sorrow of what it means to be forsaken by God.

So the sorrow we feel in conflict, Jesus is the one who feels the ultimate sorrow of what it feels like to be forsaken by God in that moment, paying that price that you and I deserve. He feels the sorrow.

Sin cannot simply be overlooked, it has to be dealt with. So Jesus deals with it on the cross, becoming our substitute and "cleaning up the stink that we're in."

And why does He feel that sorrow? Why is He on that cross to satisfy the demands of justice? Because sin cannot simply be overlooked, it has to be dealt with. It has to be dealt with. And so He deals with it on the cross and him, He becomes our substitute and takes on the punishment that we so deserve.

And then, why does He do it? Why does *He* do it and not *you*, and not *me*? Why is *He* there in *our* place? Because of God's immense love for us.

And so in conflict, we see sorrow, justice and love, all three of which emerge. And in the cross we see sorrow, justice and love, resolved. You see, He resolves it.

We're all in the same air. We smell the same stink. But it's a stink we all created.

You know, in Arabic we have a phrase. We have a lot of phrases in various languages that mean something. It's like an idiom, or a proverb, you know, like *we're all in the same boat*. You know, *we're all in the same boat*, which means, *we're all in the same situation*. I learned early on from my family that some of the Arabic phrases are really colorful; a little more colorful than the English phrases.

So we have a phrase, "[Arabic]." *We're all in the same air. We're all in the same wind*. I was told that the connotation of this isn't just *we're all in the same boat* kind of a thing. No, *we're all in the same air*

in the wind, because we all smell the same stink. But it's a stink we all created. It's a stink we all created.

So we cry out in sorrow, but we afflict sorrow on others.

We cry out and demand justice, but we act unjustly towards *them*.

We seek love, but we don't always give love to *them*—whoever *they* may be.

Jesus came to give us more than just rules and a methodology by which we could act a little bit better. He came to wake us to our need for reconciliation; to clean up the stink that we're in, and we've caused to ourselves.

He came to help us to see that reconciliation with Him is the only way to get rid of the sorrow.

That, though we demand justice, if we were to receive complete justice, we would be judged—each one of us—and found wanting.

And that, because justice has been served by Him, we are free now to love, which is to *do unto others as we would have done unto us*.

A unique way to offer peace: Do unto others, even if they never do good things to you.

As I said before—and let me wrap up with this—there are different versions of the *Golden Rule*. You know, Jesus says it one way, but others have said a different way.

You know, *Do good things and good things will happen to you*.

Or, *If you do good things for people, they'll do good things for you*.

Or, *Don't do bad things to people, because you don't want bad things to happen to you*.

Or, *You don't want people to mistreat you as well*.

Did you notice something about all of these iterations of the *Golden Rule*? If you do good things, so that people will do good things for you, that's self-seeking. If you refrain from doing bad things, so that bad things won't happen to you, that's self-protective.

Jesus doesn't formulate it that way. He says, *Do unto others, even if they never do good things to you.* That's self-sacrificial. It's a unique way to offer this peace.

See the Christian message is this; it's supposed to be about this. It's not always lived this way, but it's supposed to be about this idea that once we have the vertical reconciliation with God, we can see how our own sin has been paid for. And then we can have that horizontal reconciliation with each other, because I no longer see you as an enemy to be vanquished, or as a foe to be defeated. I see you—just as I see myself—a sinner in need of saving.

That's how *they* become *us*. And it's no longer just *they*, and *they're always wrong*. This reconciliation with God, is why the Bible says that peace is not really a process. It's not really policy. It's found in a person; found in the person of Christ. In the Bible we read:

"For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace. And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God, through the cross, by which He put to death the hostility."

If you fully embrace this message and what it means for you to have personal peace, and then spread that out into your own spheres, you would sing. And that's why Christians, when they fully embrace this idea, sing the hymn, *Here Is Love*:

Grace and love, like mighty rivers
Flowed incessant from above
And heaven's peace and perfect justice
Kiss a guilty world in love.

This peace—the *shalom*, the *eiríni*, the *salaam*, the wholeness with God, and then with each other— could be the fountain from which our policies flow. And with that, perhaps we can narrow the gap between the world as it is, and the world as we want it to be.

I know that all of you are dealing with very complex problems, and I don't mean to simplify them. You're dealing with complex domestic issues, foreign issues, conflict...But my humble suggestion is that this peace—the *shalom*, the *eiríni*, the *salaam*, the wholeness with God, and then with each other— could be the fountain from which each one of our policies flow. And with that fountain, perhaps—as Jan Eliasson was so hoping when he rededicated that mosaic—perhaps we, together with the *shalom*, *eiríni* and *salaam*, can narrow the gap between the world as it is, and the world as we want it to be.

Thank you so much for giving me your time. God bless you all.