

The Teachings of Jesus

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9

Introduction

Can you imagine telling someone like Peter, James or John “blessed are the peacemakers”? They would probably just stare at you in unbelief. Many people think the only way to have peace is to eliminate all your enemies. Their motto might well be “Fight to win!”

History is chocked full of angry disputes. Cruel inquisitions, “crusades” to overthrow rival kingdoms, and demonstrations of military might all in the name of God. In fact, there are still some believers of various denominational affiliations who love to dispute doctrine and argue causes in an effort to narrow and fragment the body of Christ. On the other hand, some people consider peace at any cost the ultimate achievement. They are prepared and determined to have peace at any price. If a leader should suddenly appear on the world scene offering a guarantee of peace he would have all of these peace seekers bowing at his feet.

But God is not so much concerned with the act of peace as with the attitude of peace. Being a peacemaker is more than someone who goes around patching up differences. Peace is more than the absence of conflict. The kind of peacemaking Jesus describes in the blessings of Matthew Chapter 5 is the kind of peace that is the outcome of a love expressed to others in good will and genuine kindness. So before we begin this lesson on peacemaking let’s read the Beatitudes once again from Matthew Chapter 5.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

It's always easier to define peace than it is to practice it. I've heard people say, "I love my church it's just some of the members I have trouble with." "I love my family it's just my brother I can't stand!" "I love my job it's just some of my co-workers that irritate me." All relationships are an exercise in problem solving! Even the best of people have either abused or have been offended their friends.

Jesus is the perfect example of character and conduct and is often referred to as the Prince of Peace. Yet he was criticized, rebuked and reviled by his contemporaries. Their hatred of Him grew so strong they finally had Him crucified. So if Jesus is the Prince of Peace what are the essential qualities of a peacemaker?

I. The Peacemakers

Our world today is not a place of peace and tranquility. Evil in the world is becoming increasingly aggressive and hostile. In John 15:18 Jesus warns us about this, "If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you."

The greatest challenge for the peacemaker is to reflect the nature of God in an environment dominated by evil. This would really qualify as a mission of peace. Jesus' definition of a peacemaker is not a reference to a diplomat who sits at a conference negotiating settlements among nations. While that may be an honorable and needed profession, Jesus applies his blessing to common people who listened to him as he taught on the hillside. His message of peace was for all people but primarily for each person. The peacemaker is one who has already seen the barriers between him and God disappear.

The peacemaker knows what it is:

- to be spiritually destitute (poor in spirit)
- to grieve over sin (mourn)
- to become submissive to God (meek)
- to have a deep hunger and thirsting for righteousness
- and as he begins reaching for it his poverty of spirit is transformed into mercy towards others because he knows what it is to be grieved and repent over sin so he can be pure in heart.

The peacemaker is an ambassador of Christ's kingdom not an ambassador of some human government. God's peacemakers are not peace negotiators. If that is what Jesus meant, He himself failed to fulfill it. Neither is a peacemaker one who refrains from taking sides. Jesus has not called us to remain neutral or passive. Edmund Burke wrote, "All that is necessary for

the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." One of the great dangers in our society comes from those who imagine they can best serve by never taking a clear stand on anything. If a peacemaker is one who never takes sides then Jesus failed miserably at it. He was the most controversial figure of His time.

- He took sides with two men against a whole town of people who elevated the value of their pigs above the value of a man's life.
- He took sides against Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, the High Priest, Chief priests, elders, scribes, and even family.
- He was always for right against wrong, righteousness against sinfulness, and truth against expediency.

A chameleon-like person can't be a peacemaker. James 1:18 says a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. You can't be for all sides of an issue or pick your position based upon the group you're with. That does not fit Christ's pattern of peacemaking.

A peacemaker is not a compromiser. A compromiser might say, "If you give up something, I'll give up something." While compromising may be a great solution for many situations there are times when it is terribly wrong and even immoral. A peacemaker is someone who has ended all conflict with God and has accepted His Word as absolute truth. You can't make peace unless you are at peace. The peacemaker has identified and accepted the terms of peace by surrendering unconditionally to Jesus – the Prince of Peace. Like Jesus, this makes the peacemaker willing to confront evil and conquer it. 1 John 3:8 says, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." Jesus didn't come to teach people how to get along with the Devil; he came to show us how to claim victory over the Devil. Paul told the Colossian believers in verse 21 of Chapter 1, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."

A peacemaker follows the example of Christ. He did not make peace with the world – he made peace with His Father. In Matthew 10:34 Jesus said, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man's enemies will be the members of his own

household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

The peacemaker is one who brings people into a peaceful relationship with God. The writer of the Proverbs says things like:

- A wrathful man stirs up strife (Proverbs 15:18)
- Where there is no talebearer, strife ceases (Proverbs 16:21)
- He that is of a proud heart stirs up strife. (Proverbs 28:25)
- Hatred stirs up strife. (Proverbs 10:12)
- He that loves transgression loves strife. (Proverbs 17:19)

This is the nature of evil.

But the nature of the peacemaker is:

- Selfish anger and hatred ceases.
- He knows when and how to keep his mouth shut.
- He also knows when and how to speak boldly.
- He does not hold grudges.
- And he does not engage in quarreling.

The peacemaker Jesus is referring to is one that maintains an attitude of quietness and confidence in the face of angry attacks. The peacemaker will endure humiliation and even angry assaults. Peacemakers do not retaliate against evil with evil.

Jesus is the model peacemaker. He did nothing to invoke the abuse and hostility aimed at him. His accusers crucified Him to appease their own hatred. Yet in the greatest moments of His persecution a tough Roman Centurion could look upon His beaten and battered body and exclaim, "Truly this man was the Son of God." Though He was reviled, he did not revile in return. And though he was falsely accused He did not react with flaming anger. Even at His crucifixion, Jesus knew their sin and selfishness and the immenseness of their evil. Yet he pleads with the Father, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

This is the true pathway to peace.

II. The Sons of God

When Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God," he does not tell us how to become a son of God. He simply says that sons of God are in fact peacemakers. People who become

peacemakers will be recognized as the children of God at the judgment and welcomed into the Father's house. John 1:12 says, "To all who received him (Jesus), and believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." Galatians 3:26 says, "For in Christ we are all sons of God through faith." In other words, we become the children of God by trusting in Christ for our forgiveness and hope.

The children of God have the character of their Father. And we know from Scripture that our heavenly Father is a "God of peace". We know that heaven is a place of peace. And most important of all, we know that God is a peacemaker! 2 Corinthians 5:19 says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" Colossians 1:20 says, "He made peace by the blood of the cross". In other words, even though by nature we are rebels against God and have committed high treason and are worthy to be eternally banned from God's presence, nevertheless God has sacrificed his own Son and now declares that anyone who wants to can come home through faith in Christ.

The whole history of redemption is God's plan to bring about a just and lasting peace between us and God. As God's children, we should be that way, too. We should demonstrate the character of our Father. What he loves we love. What he pursues we pursue. As his children we are willing to make sacrifices for peace the way God did. Paul says in Galatians 4:6, "Since we are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" And in Romans 8:14, "All who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God." Being led by the Spirit includes bearing the fruit of the Spirit. And the fruit of the Spirit is peace! Our whole salvation is a work of grace. The blessing of peacemaking lies in our hope and joy and freedom through Christ.

III. The blessing of Peacemaking

Many of the letters of the New Testament begin with the blessing of peace. "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," writes Saint Paul to the young church in Corinth. (1 Cor 1:3) Addressing the Christians in Rome, he reminds them "how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace." (Rom 10:15) Writing to the Ephesians, he tells them peace is Christ himself: "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of enmity." (Eph 2:14) He teaches the Colossians that Christ "has reconciled all things to himself, having made peace through the blood of the Cross." (Col 1:20)

Peace is not a principle, theory, concept, political program or social ideal. Peace is an attribute of God. It is Jesus who heals and forgives, and reaches

out to the very people the world tells us we should avoid, condemn, hate and possibly even kill.

Among the things that Jesus did not say in the Sermon on the Mount is, "Blessed are those who prefer peace, wish for peace, await peace, love peace, or praise peace." He blesses the makers of peace. He requires us to take an active role in peacemaking rather than passive one. In fact, peace can appear to be anything but peaceful from the point of view of those who believe peace is simply the absence of conflict.

Probably no believer has been more identified with the beatitude of peacemaking than Francis of Assisi. After his conversion and while he was still a prisoner, He had only one ambition: to live according to the Gospel. He took this to mean a life without money, wearing the same rags beggars wore, and owning nothing that might stir up the envy of others thus give rise to violence. He wanted to be one of the least, rather than a great man. His now famous prayer is about the blessing of peace.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy;
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

That prayer truly expresses the blessing of the peacemakers.

Conclusion

As followers of Jesus we have been called to peace. When he called us we found peace because Jesus is our peace. But now we are told we must make peace which requires us to renounce our desire for any violent retaliation.

John Stott writes in *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, "Peacemaking is a divine work. For peace means reconciliation and God is

the author of peace and of reconciliation. ... It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the particular blessing which attaches to peacemakers is that "they shall be called sons of God." For they are seeking to do what their Father has done, loving people with his love.

Being a peacemaker is part of surrendering to God. Only God can bring about a lasting peace. We must abandon all efforts to satisfy our own vengeance through the destruction of our enemies. God comes to us in Christ to make peace with us; and when we accept God's grace it is our responsibility in Christ to go to our enemies to make peace.

Jim Forest writes in his book, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes*, "No one has ever been converted by violence."

In an article called "Cold Turkey" Kurt Vonnegut writes, "Many Christians demand that the Ten Commandments be posted in public buildings. ... I haven't heard one of them demand that the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, be posted anywhere. "Blessed are the merciful" in a courtroom? "Blessed are the peacemakers" in the Pentagon?"

Making peace makes us God's children— which means we are related to each other as family. Peacemakers actively work to bring about a spiritual wholeness and healing between those who are sinners and God by introducing them to Jesus. Peacemaking requires time and effort. We must pursue and produce it. God approves and blesses the peacemakers.

Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians by saying, "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways." That is the very best blessing for those who want to be called the children of God.