

Lesson 8

Blessed are the Peacemakers

A creative, aggressive force for goodness...

Matthew 5.9

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

Introduction

IT HAS BEEN SAID:

Peace is that glorious moment in history when everyone stops to reload.

One hundred years ago, WWI had just come to an end. The political talk of the day was “never again.” The glowing platitudes and soaring rhetoric from world leaders assured the masses that the appropriate measures would be taken to right the wrongs that led to the awful carnage that spread across Europe. Instead, however, the moves that the western powers made during the early 1920’s only further deepened the divide and planted seeds for an even more horrific war twenty years later.

Now as we are well into the 2020’s, can we say our world is any more peaceful than a century ago? We certainly do not know economic or religious peace; racial or social peace; or family or personal peace. While there is no major, potentially world-altering shooting war going on, the first two years of the 2020’s have felt as if the 1960’s were back upon us with endless marches, protests, demonstrations, and rioting. Our political leaders accuse each other of fomenting racial strife, political conflict, and personal disagreement, while they work through the media to keep everything continually stirred up ... Hollywood joins in ... social media comes into play ... and everywhere we look is disunity. It feels as if there is little hope of any change for the better.

All of this stands in contrast to the peace God provides. There are several passages that identify God as *the God of peace*.³⁷ Jesus is the prince of peace, Luke 2.14; John 14.27; 16.33. Peace has been given to the church and Christians are expected to maintain it, Romans 12.18; Ephesians 4.3; 1 Peter 3.10-11; Titus 3.10. But as we look back broadly within the churches of Christ over the course of our lives, the American church has known anything but peace. For at least three generations, walls dividing our fellowship have been erected and vigilantly maintained with little contact between separate circles. Those who have sought to tear down the walls, move into “no man’s land,” and seek out the other side to find peace have often been “shot” by their own. While there may be a little talk about the need for more unity, those who are actually working to make it happen are far and few between. It seems most everyone is perfectly content with things the way they are. This should not be.

Zoom in our focus to the local level, many congregations have been filled with anything but peace. There are ongoing problems over how to apply doctrine, fighting over the preacher or eldership, disagreements

³⁷ Romans 15.33; 2 Corinthians 13.11; Philippians 4.9; Hebrews 13.20.

over worldliness, and many other things. At best, in many places a truce has taken place, but the underlying problems are hardly ever resolved. In my experience of preaching some of the most spirited resistance to my teaching has come when I have delivered lessons on unity and working together with other brothers and sisters. Lessons on loving each other, bearing with each other, and actually discussing differences with the view of working them out, are perceived as “soft” and “compromise.” The striking thing to me dwelling peacefully together is at the very core of doctrinal teaching.

This does not mean that we should strive for peace at any price. Compromising the truth by trying to appease people in the name of love, kindness, or compassion is not what Jesus intended. Protecting the status quo when ungodliness and unrighteousness are in view is outside of the Biblical parameter.

So then, what does it mean to be a peacemaker?

Defining the Peacemaker

At first glance we might think of *peaceableness*, which is the disinclination to engage in disputes.³⁸ Jesus calls for more than that. A peacemaker is not merely a *peacekeeper*, which involves maintaining the status quo and keeping the absence of strife and conflict in effect. A peacemaker is someone who actively overcomes evil with good. This person understands genuine peace only comes when there is righteousness. In fact, peace is inseparably tied to purity, James 3.17. The Hebrew writer also connects it to holiness, Hebrews 12.14; Psalm 85.10. True and lasting peace will never come if we try to separate it from righteousness. Righteousness works to end the harm done to relationships disunity brings and replaces it with the healing of brotherly love. In other words, the peacemaker settles issues and brings people together in mutual love and harmony. He or she is a creative, aggressive force for goodness.

A Truce is not Peace

On July 27, 1953, the Korean War ended with a truce. For the last 70 years troops have been amassed on either side of the demilitarized zone armed and ready. While the *hostilities* may have ceased, the division between the two Korea's could not be greater. The underlying hatreds and disagreements have not been fixed. Instead, those have moved below the surface where they have been allowed to fester and grow. One day, war may break out again.

In some local churches this same scenario has played itself out. Disagreements are not discussed or ever talked about. Communication breaks down and the problems move out of the spotlight. But everyone knows they are still there, and everyone just pushes everything down the road and hopes for the best. *This is not peacemaking.*

Peacemakers directly confront the problem and work for a solution. Issues are never evaded. The conflict is never glossed over, rationalized, or excused. Instead, everything is brought into the open so a lasting solution can be found. Short term pain may be experienced so that long term peace and harmony will blossom. In other words, a *peacemaker* is someone who builds bridges between those who are

³⁸ Morris, p. 100.

separated by their problems. He or she does what it takes to bring together those who are estranged from one another.

It has been said that there is often opposition before harmony and strife before peace. Truth will produce anger before it brings happiness; righteousness will produce antagonism before it produces harmony. Truth often must cut before it heals because *peace cannot come where sin remains*.³⁹

Jesus was the Ultimate Peacemaker

Isaiah puts it bluntly:

Indeed, the LORD's arm is not too weak to save, and his ear is not too deaf to hear. But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen, Isaiah 59.1-2.

Sin separated us from God. Jesus came to bring peace and remove the hostility:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds as expressed in your evil actions. But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him, Colossians 1.19-22.

Ephesians 2.12-13 is an important passage to consider. Note the terms Paul uses in verse 12 to describe our status before Christ entered the picture. Paul says we were *excluded, foreigners, and without hope and without God in the world*. Now, let's look at the peace Christ brought: *you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ*.

Jesus made peace between us and God.

We Must Become Peacemakers Between Others and God

In other words, our personal mission is to become a soul winner. We, as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5.17-21, urge others to know Christ our own *ministry of reconciliation*. This is where we come along side someone and help them open their heart to God so that sin can be removed.

We Must Work to Make Peace Between Brethren

The peacemaker promotes unity, harmony, and happiness ... rather than sowing discord and division.

If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone, Romans 12.18.

The peacemaker will:

- Not worship until straightening out his/her differences with a fellow brother/sister, Matthew 5.23.
- Quickly go to anyone who has offended him/her to correct the problem, Matthew 18.15-17.
- Choose to suffer wrong rather than strive with a brother/sister, 1 Corinthians 6.7.

³⁹ MacArthur, p. 211.

- Forgive others, even if it means doing it multiple times, Matthew 18.21-22.

Peacemakers work to promote peace within the congregation. They will not sow discord. They will learn when not to speak, James 1.19. They will view every situation in light of the gospel and choose to be active, rather than passive in advocating for peace. They seek to remain calm, selfless, loving, lovable, and approachable.

Peacemakers Will Be Called Sons of God

We will be *called sons*. Think of the dignity and honor associated with being in God's family. Think of the closeness of our relationship with God. As God's peacemakers, we are promised the wonderful blessing of being with our Father in eternity. As just as God is a peacemaker, this quality marks disciples out as His sons, "for the son shares the characteristics of the Father."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ France, p. 116.