

The Peacemaker
The Battle for Peace
January 8, 2017

PRELUDE – Then There’s You
Worship set – Everlasting God / Lord I
need you / How Great is our God

Announcements – Shannon
Setup Feature – “Peace Train” / Offering

As Shannon said, today we’re beginning a brand new series called *The Peacemaker* and I suppose it might be a good idea to admit up front that this probably isn’t the most motivational of topics with which a preacher could start off the New Year. For those who spend any time thinking about resolutions and things that they would like to change about themselves in 2017, I doubt that “becoming a person of peace” is

anywhere on the list. Or, if it is, it's probably down near the bottom.

But, for me personally, it's near the top of what I would like to see happen in my life in the coming year ... which, quite frankly, is a pretty big surprise to me.

I say that because, for me personally, I've never given a whole lot of thought to the issue until just recently. As a lifelong Christian, I'm well aware of the Beatitudes – those pithy sayings of Jesus that summarize how to experience a truly happy life – but I've always been drawn to and challenged by the ones like:

- Blessed – or happy – are the poor in spirit (those who know that they are spiritually bankrupt because of sin) for

theirs is the Kingdom of God.

- Blessed – or happy – are the pure in heart for they will see God.
- Blessed – or happy – are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.
- Blessed – or happy – are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs, too, is the Kingdom of God.

But “blessed are the peacemakers?” Well, OK. I guess.

Honestly, it doesn't sound very interesting or exciting to devote time and energy to helping people get along. It doesn't even seem to fit with the other Beatitudes. And, to be totally honest, it sounds like something best left to the womenfolk – or to those who are more relationally sensitive

than I am.

At least, *that's what I used to think.*

But what I saw in 2016 – the divisiveness and mean-spiritedness and intolerance and outright hatefulness in this country – and not just in the country at large but especially within the church; between Christians; between men and women who claim to know and follow and love Jesus – I've got to tell you, that has affected me deeply.

Something is really, really wrong when – and just to be clear, I'm talking to Christians here; if you're not a Christian I'm not laying this on you – but something is really wrong when believers-in-Jesus care more about being right and winning an argument (or an election) than they do about loving the

people who see it differently than they do; people who might even be described as their enemies. *Something is wrong.* Our vision of what it means to be a Christian and of what God Himself is all about is way off.

And the results of that, I think, are tragic – and, again, not just within the country and within our culture (though it is). I’m speaking of the division that has worked itself into families and into churches and, in fact, into the entire evangelical movement of which I am a product and a supporter.

Before and after the recent Presidential Election, I read about and personally observed far too many Christians on both sides of the political spectrum spewing anger and arrogance and self-righteousness at their brothers and sisters in Christ. The

lack of respect and empathy and compassion for “the other side” was breathtaking – and not in a good way. (And just to be clear, there were times when I acted that way, too, so I’m not intending to throw stones at anyone else).

For example, before the election, one Christian commentator with *politically conservative* leanings wrote:

If you wanted to craft the quintessential anti-Christian candidate ... a politician that is the most anti-Bible, anti-church, anti-Israel, anti-God human being on the planet: Thy name is Hillary Clinton.

And I can see why someone might conclude that. But he didn’t stop there.

He continued:

Yet, with all of this, millions of born-again, holiness, tongue-talking, Bible-thumping Christians are dutifully and catatonically pulling the lever for her. You'll do it because you are more feminist, union or minority than you are Christian.ⁱ

Wow. Really? How judgmental and disrespectful!

Following Trump's victory, another well-known Christian leader with *politically liberal* leanings wrote:

Most white evangelicals [81% voted for Trump] didn't seem to mind that they sold their souls to a man who embodies

the most sinful and shameful worship of money, sex, and power, and — perhaps more than any other public figure in America — represents the very worst values of what American culture has become.

And I can see why someone might conclude that about Donald Trump. But he didn't stop there.

He continued:

We have never witnessed such religious hypocrisy as we saw in this election, with the majority of white Christians voting for a man like Donald Trump.ⁱⁱ

White Christians who voted for Trump are hypocrites who sold their souls? What an

arrogant thing to say!

Now, my purpose in sharing these quotes isn't to rehash the election or to call out these two leaders. My purpose is to illustrate the depths to which followers of Jesus will sink when they care more about being right and winning than they do about loving the people who see things differently than they do.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

Serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.
Galatians 5:13-15 (NIV)

And there was a lot of that going on. And it broke my heart to see it. And I'm worried about it because I think the division is going to get worse before it gets better ... unless ... unless ...

... Christians (including myself) begin to understand the high value that God places on *peace* and on *people who bring peace* to the table instead of strife and division. Far too many of us are, in fact, *peace-breakers* instead of *peace-makers* – and not just in politics but all areas of our lives. I think it's time for those of us who follow Jesus to make a commitment to understanding and embracing what He was talking about when he said “blessed – or happy – are the peacemakers.”

That's why becoming a peacemaker is on my

list for 2017. And it's why I hope it will be on yours, too.

Four Myths

Of course, even with all that said, the idea of being a peacemaker still doesn't sound that motivating. It still sounds a little bit, I don't know, wimpy maybe?

That's because there are four myths – four misconceptions most of us have – when it comes to our understanding of peace and peacemaking.

Myth #1. Peace is for pansies (and we've kind of already alluded to this one).

In our culture, it's a sign of weakness not to battle for your point of view or your rights

or your whatever. Winning and being right, being first, being recognized is more important than anything else. That's why we get sucked into Twitter wars. That's why we'll post something mean and ugly on social media that we would never say in person.

So to talk about a different way of living where "peace" is the goal sounds so odd. It sounds like you have to become a wimp ... and who wants to be that?

After all, didn't Jesus say "I didn't come to bring peace but a sword"? We Christians need to stand up for what we believe in and strike with the sword of truth!

Actually, Jesus *did* say that but that's not what he meant. He was talking about how

following Him would sometimes serve to separate people in the same way that a sword separates things. He wasn't telling us to go around intentionally doing that because it would happen on its own.

In any case, that's the first myth: peace is for pansies.

The second myth is somewhat similar to it and that is that ...

Myth #2. Peacemakers are passive.

For a lot of people, peace is defined primarily as the absence of conflict. So, to be a person of peace, you just need to avoid doing anything to rock the boat or disturb whatever peace there might be. Just lay back and stay out of conflict at all costs.

To be a peacemaker means taking a much more passive hands-off approach to life; in essence you settle for being a *peacekeeper*. That's the second myth.

Myth #3. Peacemaking is for politicians.

Peacemaking is what diplomats do. Peacemaking is what the United Nations does. It's what professional mediators do when companies and unions can't come to an agreement.

Peacemaking is about the really big issues involving countries and wars and land and contracts and negotiations. It's a skill and a science way too complicated for the average person to get involved in ...

... which is why there is a fourth myth:

Myth #4. Peace for the average person is primarily personal and psychological.

At an individual level, peace isn't really about solving anything which is why whenever we talk about peace – especially those of us who are Christians – we don't think of it relationally as much as we see it as an internal state of being.

That's why we say we have peace about a decision or a situation. Or we say we feel peaceful because we're not anxious or worried.

Peace is what we ask God for when the pressures of life start to get to us. It's primarily personal and psychological.

Now, when you think about that list, it's pretty obvious why few of us are interested in making it our goal to become a peacemaker. In fact, if ...

- Peace is for pansies
- Peacemakers are passive
- Peacemaking is reserved for politicians
- Peace is primarily an internal personal and psychological state

... it's a little hard to see why Jesus would say that being *like that* would lead to happiness!

But that's *not* what He was recommending because that's not what peace and peacemaking is about.

So let me give you a couple of definitions which I think explain it and then we'll talk about why Jesus would say peacemakers find happiness and then a little bit about why "peace on Earth" is such a battle.

Two Definitions

And let's start out with a definition of peace.

Biblically-speaking, "peace" means more than the absence of conflict and immensely more than "inner peace" or "peace of mind." The best way to describe it is rooted in the Hebrew word translated "peace" in the Old Testament, which is "shalom."

One scholar says that "shalom might be called an ecological concept. It carries the sense of harmony, right relationship and the proper functioning

of all elements in the environment.”ⁱⁱⁱ

That’s when a Jewish man or woman says “Shalom,” he or she doesn’t mean “May you have no wars; may you have no conflict.” Instead, they mean “I desire for you all the goodness that God can give. May God bless you with wholeness and well-being.”^{iv}

So, with that in mind ...

Let’s define “peace” as the presence of relational harmony that facilitates wholeness and well-being.

And I think you can see why this is such a good definition. Without relational harmony, it’s almost impossible for there to be wholeness and well-being.

Many of you know that my wife, Jetta,

teaches high school math. One of the things she's repeatedly observed over the years is the correlation between a student's home life and their academic performance. When there's relational turmoil at home, students don't perform as well. Their scholastic well-being is affected.

And that's true for all of us. It's just how things work.

So, if "peace" is the presence of relational harmony that makes it possible for people to flourish and be what God intends for them to be, then *peacemaking* is about *attempting to restore* relational harmony whenever it's damaged ... which means:

- That peacemakers aren't passive.
- That peacemaking isn't for pansies

because dealing with relational turmoil is hard and it's messy.

So, with all that in mind, here's the second definition:

Peacemaking is the courageous, proactive effort to resolve conflict and restore harmony whenever necessary.

Sometimes it's necessary between us and someone else. Sometimes it's necessary between other people that we know.

In either case, peacemaking takes courage and effort because it's easier to just walk away from conflict and relational turmoil. It's easier to pretend it's not there or it's no big deal.

And peacemaking is proactive because

rarely does conflict resolve itself. Rarely does harmony restore itself. It almost always requires someone to do something.

As Joy Beth Smith puts it:

- Peacemakers aren't the people who run *from* the fight but the ones who run *to* it.
- Peacemakers aren't shushing both sides—they're intervening on behalf of both.
- Peacemakers aren't demonizing their enemies—they're deliberately valuing the Imago Dei (image of God) in everyone.

“The point of peacemaking,” she concludes, “isn't passivism; it's pro-activity, it's reconciliation, and it's restored

relationships.”^v

And that matters because it's relational harmony that facilitates wholeness and well-being in every area of life.

And I don't know about you but, to me ...

- THAT sounds like a worthy goal.
- THAT sounds like a worthy investment of my time and energy.
- THAT sounds like something that might actually make a positive difference in my life and in the lives of people around me.
- THAT sounds much more interesting and motivating than the way most of us think about peace and peacemaking.

With THAT vision in mind, I can almost see

why Jesus would say “be that kind of person and you will be happy. Be the kind of person who courageously, proactively makes the effort to resolve conflict and restore harmony whenever it’s necessary in your own life and in the lives of the people around you.”

The God of Peace

So let’s talk about that for a bit. Why would Jesus say such a thing? What is it about peacemaking that would bring happiness to a Christian?

And remember, as we learned in the generosity series last spring, whenever Jesus talks about happiness, he’s not talking about a single feel-good moment that hits you when you do something right. When

Jesus says “happy are the peacemakers” he’s not saying “try to help people get along with each other every so often and when you do that, and maybe you’ll get a warm fuzzy.”

Instead, he’s saying “if you want to increase your overall level of happiness, embrace a *lifestyle* of peacemaking. Make it a habit to do the kinds of things that resolve conflict and restore harmony in your world.”

So, again, why would he say that?

Well, let’s look at the whole Beatitude as Jesus stated it.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God. Matthew 5:9 (NIV)

Happy are the peacemakers ... why? For they will be called “the children of God.”

That's the answer. That's the reason.

Well, OK. But so what? What's so great about that? What's so happy about being called "the children of God?"

Could Jesus be saying "this is how you become a child of God: do this – be a peacemaker – and you're in"?

Well, we know that's *not* what He's saying because we know there is nothing we can do to earn God's favor and acceptance. As we say all the time around here: *Christianity is not about what we do for God. It's about what He did for us.*

And we become His children when we believe that; specifically, when we believe

that Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh who died to atone for all of our sins – past, present and future – and then rose from the dead on the third day following.”

So, Jesus *isn't* telling us how to get into the family of God. He *is* telling us that if we become peacemakers instead of peace-breakers or peace-fakers, we'll be called “the children of God” and that will be a happy state.

But, again, what's so great about being called the children of God? Why is that such a “blessed state”?

Unfortunately, “children of God” is not the best translation of that phrase from Greek to English. The translators used that language in order to be inclusive, which is a worthy

goal because Jesus wasn't trying to exclude women from peacemaking and happiness. But this is one of those rare cases where something important is obscured by it.

The word in the Greek language that's typically translated "children" is "tekna." But that's not the word that Jesus uses. What He actually says is "happy are the peacemakers for they will be called the *huios* of God."

Now *huios* means "sons" but it's not meant simply as a gender identifier. *Huios* is the term which speaks of the dignity and honor of a firstborn son who carries forth the lineage and heritage of his father. It's a way of saying, "all that's good about your father is in you, too."

So, what Jesus is saying here is that peacemakers (whether male or female) are literally bearing the honor and dignity and goodness of God in this world.

What Jesus is saying here is that if you're a peacemaker – if you are a person whose pattern of life is to courageously, proactively make the effort to resolve conflict and restore harmony whenever necessary in your own life and in the lives of the people around you a person (instead of bringing strife and division through your arrogance and intolerance) ...

What Jesus is saying here is if you are a peacemaker, *you are living a life consistent with what it means to be God's image bearer and God's offspring.*

And that is always, always, always a sure-fire prescription for happiness and joy that transcends whatever circumstance you find yourself in. For you are walking in the ways of God Himself. You are acting as God himself would act and *has* acted in this world.

Let me say that again: *when you are a peacemaker, you are acting as God Himself would act and has acted in this world.*

And that friends, brings me to the big “aha” for me in all of this – something I’ve never really noticed before – and I’m hoping that it will be for many of you as well. This is why I said at the beginning that for so many of us, our vision of what it means to be a

Christian and of what God Himself is all about is way off.

Do you know what title is given to God more than any other in the Bible? Let me just read you a few verses and see if you can figure it out.

Judges 6:23-24

*The Lord said to [Gideon],
“Peace! Do not be afraid. You are
not going to die.” So Gideon built
an altar to the Lord there and
called it The Lord Is Peace.
Judges 6:23-24 (NIV)*

Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV)

*For unto us a child is born, unto
us a son is given, and the
government will be on his
shoulders. And he will be called*

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV)

Romans 15:33 (NIV)

*The God of peace be with you all.
Romans 15:33 (NIV)*

Romans 16:20 (NIV)

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. Romans 16:20 (NIV)

... because he's the one who caused so much dissension and discord in this world.

1 Corinthians 14:33 (NIV)

God is not a God of disorder but of peace. 1 Corinthians 14:33

(NIV)

2 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV)

Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV)

Philippians 4:9 (NIV)

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9 (NIV)

1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NLT)

*May the God of peace make you holy in every way. 1
Thessalonians 5:23 (NLT)*

2 Thessalonians 3:16 (NIV)

*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. 2
Thessalonians 3:16 (NIV)*

Hebrews 13:20-21a (NIV)

*Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus ... equip you with everything good for doing his will. Hebrews 13:20-21a
(NIV)*

Are you seeing a pattern here? I am.

Most Christians today think of God as “the God who provides” or “the God who heals” or “the God who saves” or “the God who is holy” or “the God who is all the really cool

omnis” (omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient).

Even more than *all of those things* (which are certainly true), most Christians today tend to think of God primarily as “the God of grace and mercy” – and God certainly is – but we don’t realize that grace and mercy has a purpose beyond our own personal salvation.

God wants *something beyond that to happen* as a result of his grace and mercy.

The Apostle Paul puts it like this:

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace

*through his blood, shed on the
cross. Colossians 1:19-20
(NIV)*

This is one of the most profound and astounding claims in scripture. God's purpose at the cross was to restore humanity to fellowship with himself and to restore the harmony of the original creation. The ultimate mission of God in our fallen, broken world is reconciliation and peace!

So, here is the big “aha” – one that I hope will begin to reshape how we think about God and God's intentions for our world.

Our God is first and foremost the God of peace. He is the peacemaking God.

God is the god of peace – and not just personal psychological peace of mind

(though He is that, too – and we’ll talk about that next week).

God is a God who took on human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and courageously, proactively made the effort to resolve conflict between God and humanity and restore harmony to all of creation.

But His peacemaking effort goes beyond just the vertical dimension. It’s also horizontal. It’s designed to resolve conflict and restore harmony between people.

One expert on the subject has written:

“As evangelicals we love the gospel of grace outlined in Ephesians 2:1-10 (“by grace you are saved and not of works – it is the gift of God”), but we too often downplay the gospel

of peace described in the passage which immediately follows beginning in verse 13.

Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. Ephesians 2:13-17 (NIV)

I love how Paul puts that: Jesus is our peace. Jesus makes peace. Jesus proclaims peace.

And we are never more like Him (which is the key to happiness) than when we ourselves are engaged in peacemaking: courageously, proactively make the effort to resolve conflict and restore harmony whenever necessary.

*So then let us pursue the things
which make for peace and the
building up of one another.
Romans 14:19 (NIV)*

And in the weeks to come, we'll talk about how to do that.

But for now, let's pray.

<PRAYER>

Closing Feature – “White Flag”

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Next week – the peace core
2. First of the four pieces ready to pick up on your way out
3. Prayer pastor - Kitti

Endnotes

ⁱ <http://www.charismanews.com/politics/opinion/60962-the-reason-millions-of-born-again-christians-will-vote-for-hillary-clinton-will-shock-you>

ⁱⁱ <http://religionnews.com/2016/11/09/religious-reactions-to-trump-win-time-to-rebuild-and-to-reconcile/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Howard Snyder, quoted in *The Church as Reconciling Community*, Rick Love.

^{iv} Based on <https://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/2204/Happy-Are-the-Peacemakers>

^v <http://www.todayschristianwoman.com/articles/2015/june/blessed-are-peacemakers-trouble-chasers-and-trailblazers.html>