

Now You're Getting It: Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9



On September 18, 1989, singer/songwriter/musician Billy Joel released a song that would become his third number one single on the Billboard Hot 100 music charts.



We Didn't Start the Fire was unique for its rapid-fire lyrics and references to historical and pop-culture events. The song contains 119 memorable events from the year Joel was born in 1949 to the year the song was released.

As I'm sure you have already noticed, I do have the lyrics scrolling through the screen right now. If you don't remember the lyrics, or maybe never paid them much attention, now you have that chance.

What I think you're going to quickly realize that these aren't all happy memories. I would say a good chunk of them, maybe even the majority of them, are memories of times when life was uncertain, perhaps even scary, and most assuredly anything but peaceful.

Many of them are those "do you remember where you were" type of memories. And those are usually not the peaceful kind of memories.

Undoubtedly, the 40 years captured in this song were tumultuous. But, since this song was released in 1989, the world has had over 30 years to calm down. We've had plenty of time to get our act together, to get all that out of our system, and usher in a long-awaited peace.

I see some of you smiling at that. Some of you are even shaking your heads.

I guess that hasn't happened that way, has it?

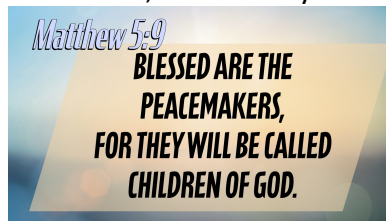
We might even say that those 40 years were just the warm-up. Indeed, our world seems crazier and less peaceful than it was in 1989. I'm sure that didn't seem possible back then. I wouldn't know for sure; I was only four.

But I do know that today, just when we think things can't get any more chaotic, we are met with disorder that didn't seem possible the day before. Sometimes it feels like we could fill up our own version of *We Didn't Start the Fire* with the events of just the past four years, let alone 40.

And yet, peace is one of the themes of the Beatitudes. Jesus does speak on peace in relation to the Kingdom of God, but as I think we've come to see, these qualities of a Kingdom-seeking people aren't usually what we would expect.

So we might be prone to ask, "If peace is a part of the Kingdom of God, and if we are called into that Kingdom, where is the peace? Why does everything seem to be in a constant state of upheaval? Why is the world thrown into war and riots and death?"

I think to answer these questions, the only logical place to go is into our Scripture reading for today. Let's go ahead and read Matthew 5:9, as Jesus says:



*⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

I believe Jesus chose the words he said with careful intention behind each of them. And so when Jesus says we are getting it when we are *peacemakers*, I believe he used that word for a reason.

How often do we look at the state of the world, or watch or read the news, or maybe attend a family gathering, or even just scroll through our Facebook feeds and lament the lack of peace? I imagine, knowing the world we live in, that it's a relatively common thing among us.

But let's take that question and flip it around to ask a similar, yet very different, question. How often do we look at those very same things and know that it's our business, our calling even, to make peace.



Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are the peacewishers," or, "Blessed are the peacewanters." He very specifically said, "Blessed are the *peacemakers*."

Have you ever thought of yourself as someone who is meant to carry peace with them?

Have you ever thought of yourself as someone who not only wants to live peaceably with all, but actually makes it happen?

Have you ever thought of yourself as the person who enters a room or a space and just exudes and air of peace and calm?

It's a good thing to want peace around you and to want peace for all the world. It's even a good thing to lament the chaotic and unpeaceful state of our world. Remember, we are getting it when we mourn, and that includes what we see when we look for peace.

But desiring peace is only the first step. *Making* peace is what a Kingdom people do.

You know, we can look at the world, we can look at the people in our everyday lives, we can get discouraged, depressed even, when peace seems to be the last thing we find.

Or – we can look at those very same things and see a world that is so very ready for a people who make peace. We can see opportunity everywhere to be a people that make peace. We can see endless chances to show how we are finally getting what it means to be peacemakers.



It's hard to think of a more prominent peacemaker in the last century than Martin Luther King, Jr. He spoke with some frequency during his years of ministry of putting on the "weapon of love."

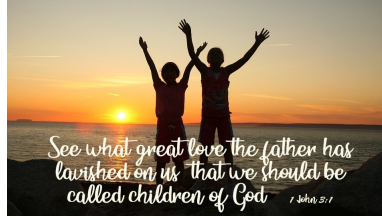
Responding to those who resisted the emerging civil rights movement, King asserted, "We will counter your force with soul force, we will match your ability to hate with our ability to love."

King also reminded us that at the heart of Jesus' life and message was this call to be peacemakers and reconcilers. Violence, said King again and again, "never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problems; it merely creates new and more complicated ones."

We live in a world that is thirsty for this gospel of peace. Perhaps that is one reason why the influence of Martin Luther King, Jr. lives on well past his tragic death, that even for someone who was taken so violently, his words still echo this need to be a people who create peace.

This is what a people of the Kingdom of God understand. And this will cause us to be recognized as children of God.

I can't think of a higher aspiration for us than to be recognized as what we truly are.

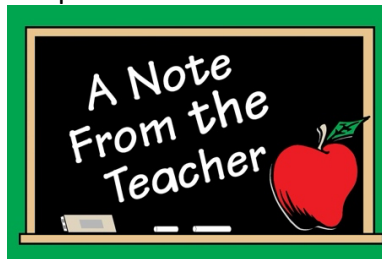


I'm reminded of 1 John 3:1:

*"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are!"*

Being called children of God is the highest compliment we could receive.

But being called children of God is important for another reason.



A teacher sent home a note with one of her students, Joey, and it was addressed to his parents. For all of the parents this morning who sent kids back to school this week, or if you have ever had kids in school, we know this probably isn't good news.

When Joey's mother read the note, what she found was this: "Joey is a very bright boy. He seems to understand everything, but I find he spends far too much time thinking about sports and video games."

The next day, Joey handed the teacher a return note from his mother. The teacher was surprised at the mother's response: "If you happen to find a solution, please advise. I have the same problem with his father."



Like father, like son.

Sometimes that phrase is like it was in that little story. Sometimes it means we have inherited some undesirable genetic trait.

But not so with being called children of God. Being called children of God means that we have inherited those qualities of our heavenly Father. It means that what makes God good and loving and just and merciful and righteous has become evident in us and in our actions.

It means that as we go about making peace among others and throughout the world that people see what God we serve. As we realize that everywhere we go, we bring peace with us, we are becoming more like Him.

Like Father, like children.



The world in its current state is probably not a world that will make a song like Billy Joel's *We Didn't Start the Fire* obsolete. This thematic fire that is spreading in that song is one that is caused by sin, caused by everything that is apart from God.

It's a fire of chaos and unrest that has been burning since humans chose to disobey our Creator.

But Jesus came to start a new fire, one that would eventually cleanse us and cleanse the world. It is a fire that is very unlike the fire we know: it is a fire that will spread peace to every corner of the world.

We may not have started that fire, either, but it is a fire that we, as a Kingdom People, are to spread. And as Jesus is at work in us, cleansing our hearts and calling us into that greatest peace we have ever known, so we are to be at work in the world.

And our work is to make peace.

It is good for us to desire peace, to love peace, to long for peace, and even to ache and mourn when peace is not present.

But that's not the end of it. Because for a Kingdom People, we need to be the ones who take initiative to make peace everywhere we go and with everyone we meet. We carry the peace of Christ with us, but we are not intended to keep that peace to ourselves.

We are intended to be people who make peace wherever we go.

And that marks us as children of God, as children of God who are finally getting it.

And all of God's people said...